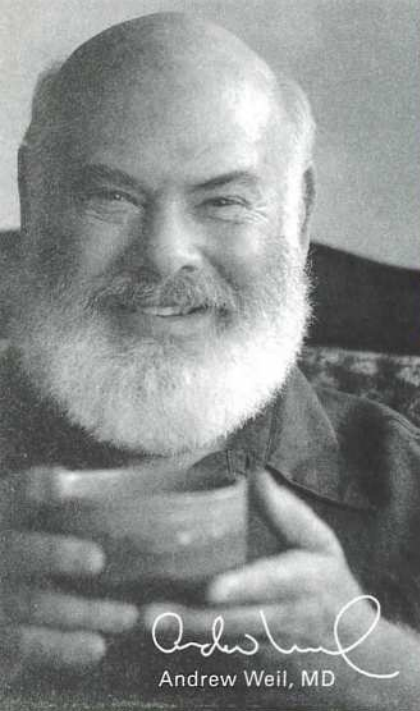




Andrew Weil, MD

Dr. Andrew Weil's

JANUARY 2007

self healing

CREATING OPTIMUM HEALTH FOR YOUR BODY AND SOUL

Turn Over Some New Leafy Greens

It was not easy being green during last fall's bagged spinach and lettuce scares. But the fresh spinach layoff may have spurred shoppers to turn over some new leaves in the produce aisle. By seeking less-familiar leafy greens, you'll discover wonderful sources of antioxidants like vitamins A and C, health-promoting phytonutrients, plus vitamin K, folate, and fiber. Many are also rich in calcium, iron, and potassium. So sample nature's bounty before resorting to the same old standbys.

I think greens should be more prominent on the American plate, especially since most adults fall short of the recommended 3 cups of dark green vegetables a week. Here are six cooking greens worth knowing. To maintain nutrients, limit liquid and cook for the least time possible.

Broccolini ▶ Broccoli has been hailed the "crown jewel of nutrition," but I consider this newcomer a gem in its own right. It's a cross between broccoli and Chinese kale with slender stems topped by small florets. Also dubbed baby broccoli or asparagus, Europeans call it "tender stem" because it's less fibrous than other greens and edible from flower to stem. Broccolini has a pleasing sweet and slightly peppery taste. *Tips:* Cook this delicious green with olive oil and garlic, or quickly steam and flavor with lemon juice.

Broccoli rabe ▶ Popular in Italian and Asian cooking, this somewhat bitter green is related to broccoli and turnips. Known also as broccoli rape or raab, it has thin stems that lend strong flavor to pasta, rice, and soups as well as crunchy florets and chewy leaves that make a zesty side dish. *Tips:* Add a splash of vinegar after steaming, sautéing, or braising to balance this green's bitterness in a pleasant way.

Collards ▶ These nonheading cabbages are a Southern mainstay and reach their seasonal peak in winter. Remove midrib and slice or chop leaves. *Tips:* I like these

greens lightly cooked, sautéing them in olive oil with garlic and other seasonings. Simmering them is also popular.

Kale ▶ I grow Red Russian and Italian black (called lacinato or cavalo nero) varieties; I prefer their mellower flavor and smoother leaves to other types with thick leaves and curly edges. A favorite of mine, this cabbage family descendent is often used raw as a garnish and seems to grow sweeter after the first frost. Remove stems and midrib and sauté leaves with onion, garlic, and red pepper flakes. *Tips:* Kale also works well in pasta, soups, and stews.

Swiss chard ▶ A good substitute for spinach in recipes, chard is a beet relative. Its leaves have a hint of sharpness, especially when older, and are attached to red, white, or yellow stalks. Chard, collards, and spinach have high oxalate levels, which people prone to calcium oxalate kidney stones should limit. This green should be cooked. *Tips:* I like to remove stalks, but many people dice and cook them along with the leaves. Lightly sauté leaves, or put chard in soups, casseroles, and stews.

Bok choy ▶ This Chinese member of the cabbage family has white stalks and large green leaves. The leaves taste cabbage-like while the mild stalks are crispy and juicy. *Tips:* Bok choy has a high water content and needs little cooking. Add it toward the end of stir-fries, cooking stalks first, then leaves a minute or two later. **SP**

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TIPS

FOR LIVING WELL

■ Eating **collard** greens to symbolize dollars, and black-eyed peas to represent coins, is a New Year's Day tradition in the US South. It's thought to bring you luck and good fortune throughout the coming year.

■ Go **snowshoeing** and cross-country skiing for free at Winter Trails Day 2007, held on January 6. To find listings for more than 100 locations in North America, visit wintertrails.org.

■ Look for the **gold** whole grain stamp on packaging to spot healthy food sources. Aim for at least three servings of whole grains daily.

■ Enter an **ICE** (in case of emergency) listing in the address book of your cell phone. Place the ICE acronym next to a person who can assist emergency workers if any important medical decisions need to be made.

■ Discover the **peppadew**. This South African sweet pepper adds a spicy kick to sandwiches, salads, and salsa and looks like a seedless cherry tomato. **SP**

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HEALTH IN THE NEWS

Can Red Wine Promote Longevity?

Resveratrol, a substance in red wine, increased the lifespan and endurance of lab mice in two new studies. In one trial, the compound allowed mice fed a high-fat, high-calorie diet to live normal, active lives despite becoming obese—adding the equivalent of 10 or 20 human years to their lifespan (*Nature*, November 16, 2006). Another study found mice fed resveratrol could run twice as far as usual, apparently by boosting their metabolism to make muscles burn more calories and work more efficiently (*Cell*, December 15, 2006).

Comment ▶ These studies are compelling, but you'd have to drink 100 glasses of red wine daily to get the amount of resveratrol given to mice, and the safety and effectiveness of resveratrol supplements are just beginning to be established. This is an interesting area of research, and I'll be keeping a close eye on findings.

Move More, Sniffle Less

Regular moderate physical activity may be the route to fewer colds. In a recent study, researchers divided 115 overweight and sedentary postmenopausal women into two groups: Half did 45 minutes of moderate exercise five days a week, while the rest did 45 minutes of stretching once a week. During the one-year study, the regular workout group had about half the risk of colds as those who stretched. In the last three months, the stretching group was three times more likely to catch a cold than the more active group. (*American Journal of Medicine*, November 2006)

Comment ▶ Doing moderate exercise regularly and sticking with it over time seems to improve immune function and keep colds away. This study was one of the largest and longest to show exercise's protective effects against the common cold.

Red Meat Linked to Breast Cancer

Laying off burgers and steaks might help younger women avoid the most common type of breast tumor. After following nearly 91,000 nurses aged 26 to 46 for 12 years, scientists found that women who ate more than one-and-a-half servings of beef, lamb, or pork a day had almost double the risk of developing hormone receptor-positive breast cancer compared to those who ate three or fewer weekly servings. (*Archives of Internal Medicine*, November 13, 2006)

Comment ▶ This research provides incentive to eat less meat. One possible explanation for this association is that red meat delivers too much iron in a form that promotes the malignancy; other potential causes are the carcinogens that form in cooked meats and the growth hormones fed to cattle. Researchers have not yet studied if limiting red meat would reduce breast cancer risk in older women.

Curry Boosts Brainpower

A diet containing the yellow spice turmeric may help protect the aging brain, says a study that tracked the curry consumption of more than 1,000 older Asians not affected by dementia. Turmeric is a chief ingredient in curry. People who consumed curry "often" (more than once a month) or "occasionally" (once or more in six months) had better test scores for cognitive performance than those who ate it "never or rarely." (*American Journal of Epidemiology*, November 1, 2006)

Comment ▶ I often recommend people include turmeric in their diet. This spice is widely used in India, where the prevalence of Alzheimer's disease is significantly lower than in the United States. Previous studies have shown that curcumin, one of the constituents of turmeric, has potent antioxidant and anti-inflammatory properties and inhibits plaque buildup associated with Alzheimer's.

Banning Trans Fats in Restaurants

Some local governments have recently implemented voluntary programs to encourage restaurants to reduce trans fats from margarine, shortening, and partially hydrogenated oils. But they've been unsuccessful. Eateries use trans fats in deep-fried foods and baked goods because they extend the shelf life and can be reused for frying. While it's unusual to enact legal bans on foods, advocates see no other option to protect the public than to take this step, and I agree with them.

Eating just 4 grams of trans fats a day greatly increases the risk of cardiovascular disease (one serving of fries has 5 grams; a Danish pastry 3). These dangerous fats also promote chronic inflammation, diabetes, and cancer. While the FDA requires trans fats to be listed on all packaged foods, restaurant diners have no way to know whether the food they order contains them. It's estimated that replacing trans fats with unsaturated fats may cost an extra penny per order of fries and that the taste difference would be minimal. But either way, there's a price. "You may eat healthy, but if the rest of the community doesn't, you still pay for it through health care," says Neal Barnard, MD, president of the Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine.

In December, New York became the first US city to ban trans fats. The new law requires that all restaurant foods contain less than 0.5 grams of artificial trans fats per serving by July 2008. I applaud this action. The town of Tiburon, California, enacted a similar ban more than a year ago. Until all governments recognize this threat, Dr. Barnard recommends avoiding fried foods and pastries and choosing vegetarian entrées when dining out.



Andrew Weil, MD

Stealth Sources

Trans fats may turn up in hot cocoa, taco shells, pancake mixes, frozen waffles, salad dressings, pizza dough, nondairy creamers, ramen noodles, and whipped toppings.

Urban vs. Suburban Living: Which Is Healthier?

The place you call home affects your health. So I'll compare some recent findings on the health of people living in cities versus suburban areas.

The evidence. According to one study, people who live in suburbia are more likely to report chronic health problems such as high blood pressure and arthritis than those living in urban locations (*Public Health*, October 2004). Dependence on cars may be responsible since studies suggest suburban sprawl decreases time spent walking and increases time in the car. Other research suggests city dwellers are more likely to do "utilitarian walking" for everyday activities like commuting or errands. An extra 10 minutes a day of walking can shed a couple pounds per year.

Lawrence Frank, PhD, an urban planning professor at the University of British Columbia, has linked suburban car dependence with a greater risk of obesity. He concluded that for every additional hour a day spent in a car, there's a 6 percent increase

in the chance of being obese and for each additional kilometer (about .6 miles) walked a day, there's a 5 percent reduction. Yet, Toronto scientists recently questioned whether suburban sprawl causes obesity. They suggest that heavier people are *pre-disposed* to live in more sprawling areas because they prefer driving.

A report in the December 2006 issue of the *American Journal of Pre-*

ventive Medicine describes how to curb our reliance on cars by creating "activity-friendly" communities. Suggestions include more sidewalks and bike lanes, better mass transit, plus intermingling residential and commercial buildings so people can walk to the store or movies.

As for city dwellers, they might have to put up with noise, poor air quality, and a more hectic pace. **SP**

Tips for Suburbanites ▶ Ann Forsyth, PhD, director of the Metropolitan Design Center at the University of Minnesota, says suburbanites often value natural areas, and might enjoy walking along trails and leafy banks to connect with the natural world. This also gets people out of their cars and meeting each other. If your neighborhood lacks sidewalks or a park, consider mall-walking, which offers even surfaces and a controlled climate. Avoid fast food restaurants you pass during your commute.

Tips for Urbanites ▶ Reconnect with nature by visiting parks and green spaces regularly or bringing flowers indoors. A HEPA air filter and white noise generator can help with air and noise pollution. Take advantage of convenient access to organic supermarkets, yoga or meditation classes, and alternative practitioners. Lawrence Frank recommends walking or biking to do your errands. He also suggests establishing routines to get outside, such as purchasing fresh foods daily.

Nutrition & Prostate Cancer: Top 10 Risk Reducers

Men can greatly lower their odds of prostate cancer by adjusting what is—and isn't—on their dinner plates and in their drinking glasses. For instance, diets high in red meat and dairy have been linked to a higher risk of the disease, and preliminary research suggests the omega-6 fatty acids in corn and other vegetable oils may spur prostate cancer growth, probably by increasing inflammation. Meanwhile, I've seen mounting evidence that other foods and beverages described here have protective effects.

Cooked tomatoes. Eating tomato sauce at least twice a week can lower the risk of prostate cancer by 33 percent, according to data from more than 47,000 men in the Health Professionals Follow-Up Study (*Journal of the National Cancer Institute*, March 6, 2002). Tomatoes are rich in lycopene, a carotenoid pigment that acts as a powerful antioxidant and helps to ward off the malignancy. *My advice:* Lycopene is more readily available from cooked tomatoes than from raw ones and needs some fat to be absorbed, so a good choice is tomato sauce made with olive oil. Watermelon and pink grapefruit also have lycopene, but in smaller amounts.

Cruciferous vegetables. Other findings from the Health Professionals Follow-Up Study concluded that men who ate at least five servings a week of cruciferous veggies were 10 to 20 percent less likely to develop prostate cancer (*Cancer Epidemiology, Biomarkers & Prevention*, December 2003). Crucifers—including broccoli, kale, Brussels sprouts, cabbage, collards, cauliflower, and bok choy—are packed with cancer-protective phytonutrients like indoles and sulforaphane. These vegetables are also a source of vegetable fiber, which has been linked with a lower risk of prostate cancer. *My advice:* Eat cruciferous vegetables most days of the week.

The Age Connection

Your age may influence how some dietary and other lifestyle factors affect your prostate cancer risk. Harvard researchers theorize that *inflammation* plays a significant role in prostate cancer that occurs in older men, while *hormones* may be more important to causing the disease in younger men. Some key examples:

Lycopene. This pigment in tomatoes appears more protective in men over 65 than in those under 65. Lycopene helps reduce damage from inflammation.

Exercise. Moderate physical activity lowers an older man's risk of prostate cancer, but seems to offer little or no protection in younger men. Exercise can reduce inflammation by improving insulin resistance.

Soy. Because soy foods can help normalize hormone levels, I suspect they're more protective against prostate cancer the earlier in life you start eating them.

Soy foods. A recent analysis of eight studies concluded that regular consumption of soy foods was associated with a 30 percent lower risk of prostate cancer (*International Journal of Cancer*, November 20, 2005). Plus, eating a soy-rich diet may improve prostate-specific antigen (PSA) levels, a marker for prostate cancer, in men with the disease. Soy is high in isoflavones, phytoestrogens that may protect against prostate and breast cancer by helping normalize hormone levels. One theory is that phytoestrogens attach to estrogen receptors but activate them only weakly. *My advice:* Eat one or two servings a day of whole soy foods like tofu, tempeh, soy milk, edamame, and soy nuts. Soy supplements, including soy protein powder, may not offer the same benefits.

Oily fish. Men with the highest intakes of the omega-3 fatty acids EPA and DHA from oily fish were 26 percent less likely to develop advanced prostate cancer than men with the lowest intakes, according to an analysis of data from the Health Professionals Follow-Up Study (*American Journal of Clinical Nutrition*, July 2004). EPA and DHA may cut cancer risk by inhibiting inflammation, and lab studies suggest they can block the spread of prostate cancer to other parts of the body. *My advice:* Eat oily fish such as wild Alaskan salmon, sardines, herring, or black cod at least twice a week, or take a fish-oil supplement at a dose of 1 to 2 grams a day.

Flaxseed. These tiny seeds are the richest food source of lignans, phytoestrogens thought to protect against hormone-driven cancers such as prostate, breast, and ovarian. Flax is also a good source of omega-3s and fiber. A 2001 study of 25 prostate cancer patients found that daily consumption of ground flaxseed combined with a low-fat diet slowed cancer growth between diagnosis and surgery. *My advice:* Eat 2 tablespoons of freshly ground flaxseed a day; sprinkle it on cereals, salads, and vegetables. Avoid supplementing with flaxseed oil, which often lacks the beneficial lignans and fiber and also goes rancid quickly.

Chili peppers. Capsaicin, the compound in chili peppers that gives them their heat, may also kill prostate cancer cells, says preliminary research. Capsaicin caused some 80 percent of human prostate cancer cells growing in mice to die, and prostate cancer tumors in mice fed capsaicin were about one-fifth the size of those in untreated mice. These findings have yet to be confirmed in humans, but researchers believe capsaicin may work by blocking a chemical that promotes cancer cell growth (*Cancer Research*, March 15, 2006). *My advice:* You may want to spice up meals with jalapeños, habaneros, and other hot peppers.

Green tea. This beverage is high in antioxidant compounds called polyphenols that may be protective against a range of cancers. In a clinical trial of 62 men with precancerous prostate cells, those who supplemented with 600 mg daily of polyphenols extracted from green tea (the equivalent of drinking 15 cups) for a year were less likely to develop prostate cancer than men who took a placebo (*Cancer Research*, January 15, 2006). *My advice:* Men at an elevated risk for

prostate cancer (like African Americans and those with a strong family history of the disease) might consider taking a green-tea extract, but otherwise, I suggest men drink at least 2 cups of green tea daily (4 cups may be better).

Red wine. In a study of 1,456 middle-aged men, those who drank four or more 4-ounce glasses of red wine a week had a 48 percent lower risk of prostate cancer than non-drinkers (*International Journal of Cancer*, January 1, 2005). The antioxidant resveratrol, abundant in the skins of red grapes, may be responsible for wine's protective effects. *My advice:* If you're a teetotaler, there's no need to change. But if you do drink, favor red wine and limit your intake to a glass or two a day.

Pomegranate juice. A recent study of 46 men with rising PSA levels after surgery or radiation for prostate cancer suggests that drinking 2 cups of pomegranate juice daily may slow the progression of the disease (*Clinical Cancer Research*, July 1, 2006). These findings have prompted a larger clinical trial at 10 medical centers. Pomegranate juice is very high in polyphenols and contains isoflavones found in soy and

ellagic acid found in berries, another compound with cancer-preventive properties. *My advice:* Consider drinking a daily glass of pomegranate juice if you're at high risk.

Supplements. Vitamins D and E and selenium have shown promise for reducing prostate cancer risk, but it's difficult to get adequate amounts of these nutrients from diet alone. *My advice:* Take daily supplements of vitamin D3 (cholecalciferol; at least 1,000 IU), vitamin E (either 400 IU of natural mixed tocopherols, or 80 mg of mixed tocopherols and tocotrienols), and selenium (200 mcg). Men at high risk may also want to take New Chapter's Zyflamend, which contains anti-inflammatory herbs such as turmeric. A lab study found that the supplement suppressed the growth of—and helped destroy—prostate cancer cells (*Nutrition and Cancer*, October 2005), and a clinical trial is now under way. 

For more information, visit prostatecancerfoundation.org or see *Dr. Katz's Guide to Prostate Health* by Aaron Katz, MD (Freedom Press, 2006).

Mind-Body Approaches for Diabetes

As the diabetes epidemic worsens, new approaches arise to treat or prevent the disease. In September, inhaled insulin was introduced as an alternative to injections. (It's not recommended for people with asthma or other breathing problems.) While this delivery method is convenient, I'm not convinced it provides the best glucose control because it can't deliver precise doses. There is also increasing awareness that metabolic syndrome, marked by a large waist, high triglycerides, low HDL cholesterol, and a tendency to hypertension, may be an important risk factor for diabetes. Some experts believe the syndrome is poorly defined and shouldn't be used as a diagnosis.

Diet and exercise play significant roles in managing and preventing diabetes, but new research suggests other lifestyle measures, especially relaxation techniques, can help lower blood sugar. One study found that people with high stress and hostility levels are more likely to have insulin resistance (*Psychosomatic Medicine*, September 2006). Perhaps the hormones controlling blood sugar rise, promoting insulin resistance in genetically susceptible individuals.

Reducing stress with the following techniques can not only improve blood sugar, but also make it easier to cope with diabetes and improve compliance with treatment, such as daily monitoring, medication use, and dietary and exercise advice.

Progressive muscle relaxation (PMR). In *The Mind-Body Diabetes Revolution* (Free Press, 2004), Duke University psychologist Richard Surwit, PhD, says that PMR is easy to learn and has been tested often with diabetes. A 2002 study of 108 people with type 2 diabetes found that those who practiced PMR in addition to receiving standard care had lower glucose levels than those getting only standard care. PMR involves the tensing and relaxing of one muscle group at a time from head to toe until the entire body feels calmer.

Meditation. People who meditate regularly gain self-awareness, can sense stress reactions coming on, and can keep them from escalating. To help control blood sugar, David Rakel, MD, medical director of the University of Wisconsin's Integrative Medicine Program, suggests trying mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR), a meditation technique

derived from Buddhist tradition. (You can find a MBSR program at umassmed.edu/cfm/mbsr.) Walking meditation is also useful because it's both a physical and mental exercise, says Randy Horwitz, MD, PhD, of the University of Arizona's Program in Integrative Medicine. "It's double the bang for your buck," he explains.

Yoga. Researchers in India found that when 20 people with diabetes practiced daily yoga for 40 days, there was a significant decrease in their fasting glucose levels and beneficial changes in insulin levels.

Cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT). In this approach, a psychotherapist teaches patients to change disruptive thought patterns and adopt healthier ways of coping with emotions. In a 1998 study of 51 people with type 2 diabetes who suffered from major depression, those who had 10 weeks of CBT were more likely to achieve remission from depression than those not receiving therapy. This is important because untreated depression is often linked to poor compliance with diabetes treatment. The subjects in the study also experienced improved blood sugar levels within six months of CBT treatment. 

A Natural Treatment Plan for Hot Flashes

Although some women view a hot flash as a power surge (or your inner child playing with matches), others find the swell of heat—often combined with flushing, sweating, heart palpitations, or anxiety—unbearable. Hot flashes are just as individualized as women and require some trial and error to manage, especially since their cause isn't fully understood. "We know hot flashes have to do with sex hormones because women experience them with a drop in estrogen levels," says Fredi Kronenberg, PhD, director of the Rosenthal Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine at Columbia University. "However, we don't know why a drop in estrogen leads to hot flashes or how taking estrogen helps to relieve them."

The Women's Health Initiative (WHI) study, which found that the long-term use of estrogen and progestin as hormone replacement therapy (HRT) increased a woman's risk of blood clots, heart disease, stroke, and breast cancer, has many women turning to natural options for menopausal symptoms. Below is a plan for handling hot flashes.

STEP 1 **Change your ways.** In addition to wearing layers of easily removable clothing and carrying a fan, make dietary changes. High-fiber diets have been shown to reduce hot flashes in cancer patients, and consuming more phytoestrogen-rich whole soy foods may help moderate hormonal imbalances by mimicking estrogen's effects in the body. It's unclear if concentrated phytoestrogens are safe, so avoid soy supplements or regular consumption of soy powders. Also watch for trigger foods: Some women report that spicy foods, alcohol, sugar, and caffeine can bring on hot flashes. Maintaining a healthy weight and exercise program has also been shown to reduce symptoms.

STEP 2 **Shift your mindset.** Approaching menopause as a transition, rather than a sign of aging, may pay off, since stress and anxiety have been linked to more intense hot flashes. When you feel a hot flash coming on, take a few deep breaths. Studies have shown this simple relaxation technique can reduce the frequency of hot flashes by up to 60 percent. Recent research has also shown that meditation or hypnotherapy may reduce hot flash frequency and severity. Yoga and tai chi can also be extremely relaxing.

STEP 3 **Use black cohosh.** Preparations from this plant's roots and stems are the most popular natural alternatives for hot flashes, but studies on its effectiveness have been mixed, and it's unclear how it works. Black cohosh (*Cimicifuga racemosa*) doesn't seem to be estrogenic in lab studies, explains Kronenberg, which suggests it may be a safer choice for women with a personal or family history of breast cancer. The herb might work through pathways in the nervous system and brain, according to Tieraona Low Dog, MD, director of education and botanical studies at the Program in Integrative Medicine. "This wouldn't be a surprise," she says. "Historically, the herb has been used as a treatment for depression." More may be known next

spring: Kronenberg has just completed a year-long study looking at black cohosh and its effects on hot flashes, bone density, and cognitive function, and an ongoing trial at the University of Illinois is comparing black cohosh, red clover, and a placebo for hot flashes.

Start with 40 mg daily of a standardized extract such as Remifemin and only increase the dose if necessary. It's unclear how this dosage translates to powdered and other forms. Some countries require warning labels about potential liver damage on black cohosh products, but research is inconclusive. To be prudent, avoid the herb if you have liver problems or take medications affecting the liver.

STEP 4 **Explore other natural options.** The phytoestrogen-rich herb **red clover** is a common ingredient in natural remedies for menopause. Although the research is limited, some women find red clover effective for relieving hot flashes and it appears safe. Researchers found that after a year of taking the herb, postmenopausal women showed no sign of change in breast tissue, although it didn't seem to change hot flashes (*Breast Cancer Research*, February 2004). Follow package directions. Some patients report success using **evening primrose oil**, which also seems harmless but has little research. Take 500 mg twice a day. Some Chinese herbal products can also be beneficial, but as Kronenberg points out, many packaged products may be of low quality. Instead, visit a practitioner of **traditional Chinese medicine**, who can create an herbal blend based on your individualized symptoms. Acupuncture may also help.

STEP 5 **Consider hormones carefully.** The results from the WHI may have been due to the age of the women studied, the type, dosage, or duration of hormones used, or all these factors. So before deciding on any form of hormone therapy, consider the health risks. One popular alternative to regular HRT is bioidentical hormones, which are made from the same starting materials as many pharmaceutical hormones but designed to be chemically identical to what a woman's body would make. There is no proof that bioidenticals are any safer than other hormone therapies. For severe hot flashes, I recommend 17-beta estradiol, a bioidentical hormone sold under the brand names Estrace, Vivelle, and Climara, in low doses for short-term use. Dr. Low Dog recommends women start taking estradiol at .25 mg daily, then go up to .35 or .5 mg if necessary. I don't think it's necessary to buy hormones at a compounding pharmacy.

Progesterone creams to counteract estrogen's effects and protect against endometrial cancer are also available, but I worry that absorption of these products is unpredictable. A better choice may be oral micronized progesterone, a plant derivative sold as the prescription drug Prometrium that is similar to the hormone naturally produced by women.

You should stop taking any product (natural, synthetic, or bioidentical) every three to six months to see if you need to continue treatment. Be prepared for a short-term increase in symptoms until the body adjusts to the change. 

Ask Dr. Weil Aluminum & Dementia; Velvet Antler; and More

I've read that aluminum is linked to dementia. Do aluminum cans, foil, and other products pose a problem?

I wouldn't be concerned about sipping from beverage cans or wrapping foods with aluminum foil. The cans are coated to prevent leaching of the metal into the drink, and negligible amounts of aluminum leach into food from contact with foils or trays. But I would avoid letting aluminum cookware surfaces touch your food, especially tomato products and other acidic mixtures that may cause the metal to leach. I would also steer clear of aluminum-containing antacids and antiperspirants, two common and more important sources of aluminum that get into the body. Small amounts of aluminum present in food, water, air, and soil may also enter the body. In my opinion, the metal has no place in human nutrition and may be harmful.

Currently, the link between aluminum exposure and an increased risk for Alzheimer's disease is inconclusive. Scientists have found aluminum in the brain plaques and tangles of people with Alzheimer's as well as more cases of the disease in areas where the aluminum content of the water supply is highest. This has made people wary, but it doesn't prove aluminum exposure causes Alzheimer's disease. With aluminum widespread in the environment, the health effects of lifetime exposure to it are unknown.

Are cosmetics and sunscreens that contain nanoparticles safe?

Generally, I'm not worried about nanoparticles, except for those containing titanium. To make cosmetics and sunscreens transparent on the skin, manufacturers reduce the particle size of the ingredients to one millionth of a millimeter. Product labels refer to these nanoparticles as "microfine" or "micronized." Some items contain nanoparticles of titanium dioxide or zinc oxide as protection against the sun's ultraviolet rays.

My concerns about titanium dioxide stem from studies suggesting that

it may encourage the formation of free radicals when exposed to light and damage cells. The US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention already identifies titanium dioxide as a potential carcinogen. However, there's been conflicting research on whether nanoparticles in general are able to penetrate the skin, and some studies have concluded they never reach living cells, only dead skin cells. To be on the safe side, I suggest reading the labels on sunscreen and cosmetic products and steering clear of micronized titanium.

As for zinc oxide, I don't know of any good research suggesting it's dangerous. In fact, I'm pleased that sunscreens containing microfine zinc oxide (also listed as Z-Cote) are now available because it's been shown to be very effective in protecting against the sun's rays and can be used on children or people with sensitive skin.

My brother-in-law has dry mouth due to radiation therapy and surgery for oral cancer. Can you recommend something?

He can use marshmallow root and slippery elm to help relieve dry mouth, as these herbs can keep tissues moist. Marshmallow root (which looks

nothing like the sugary treat) can be taken as a tincture (10 to 25 ml three times daily) or in capsule form (four to six 500-mg capsules a day). A typical dose of slippery elm is 500 to 1,000 mg three times daily and is usually taken as a lozenge. Another option is chewable tablets of DGL (deglycyrrhized licorice), which may protect mucous membranes and speed healing. Slowly chew two tablets three or four times a day between meals. The homeopathic remedy Traumeel, used to treat mouth sores, can also soothe dry mouth. Your brother-in-law should experiment with these remedies or combinations to find what works best for him.

I also suggest trying hypnosis or acupuncture. The ancient needling technique may work best when combined with local massage by the acupuncturist to enhance blood flow.

In addition, I would avoid or minimize the use of medications that can cause or worsen dry mouth, including nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs, sedatives, calcium channel blockers, antidepressants, anti-anxiety agents, antihistamines, antacids, diuretics, and smoking-cessation products. The good news is that over time, normal salivary function should return.

continued on next page

MY TAKE ON Home Genetic Testing

With a few clicks of your mouse, you can order a test over the Internet to find out if you're inherently prone to cancer, Alzheimer's, and other diseases. For roughly \$500, you're mailed a test kit containing a swab to sample cells inside your cheek and send them to a lab for analysis. After a few weeks, you log on for the results. These direct-to-consumer genetic tests may seem like a simple way to take an active role in your health care, but this is one situation where a vastly unregulated business is jumping ahead of science. I also worry that people are receiving potentially life-changing news without input from their doctor or a genetic counselor to interpret results.

A company doing genetic testing needs to work with a regulated lab and prove the value of the test, explains Ralph Snyderman, MD, chancellor emeritus for health affairs at Duke University Medical Center. Proving the value is the hardest part. We're still unable to accurately predict what many interpretations mean, he says. A positive test doesn't guarantee a person will develop the disease, only that their lifetime risk for it is higher than normal.

BOTTOM LINE Approach all genetic tests with caution and expect genomics to be the basis for individualized medicine in the future. 

Do you recommend velvet antler?

I have no personal experience with this Chinese remedy, so I turned to Yoon Hang (John) Kim, MD, a graduate Fellow at the Program in Integrative Medicine and now director of the Summit Center for Health and Healing near Atlanta. He doesn't recommend velvet antler, traditionally used in Chinese medicine to increase energy by nourishing the blood.

Velvet antler refers to the growing antler of deer or elk that's covered with velvety hair. The antlers are harvested (using a local anesthetic) during this fast-growth stage because they are supposedly richest in nutrients and have potent healing properties. Although the animal isn't killed during the process, discomfort probably occurs. Velvet antler is recommended in Asia for everything from boosting immunity and improving sexual performance to easing liver inflammation and eczema. But there's little science to back these claims, and the safety of products, sold as liquid extracts, tablets, or capsules, is hard to determine, says Dr. Kim. It

depends on where the animal is from, what it eats, and what kind of testing is done on the product. Instead of velvet antler, he favors tonic herbs (such as good-quality ginseng), which don't carry these same risks and are cheaper.

Do you have a home remedy for dealing with edema in both legs?

Before taking any home remedy for edema, visit your doctor to learn the cause. Edema is a common symptom of congestive heart failure, leg venous insufficiency, preeclampsia, and lung disease. Other causes are prolonged standing or sitting, the normal fluid retention during pregnancy, heat, and low protein levels. Some causes are serious conditions, requiring conventional medical treatment.

In general, I recommend you limit your salt intake, avoid sitting or standing for long periods of time, elevate your legs above your heart for at least 10 minutes a day to promote blood flow, and protect the bloated leg area from pressure and extreme temperatures. Studies have shown that taking

horse chestnut seed extract may help relieve pain and swelling. The seed's active compounds seem to inhibit enzymes that can damage capillary walls, and this helps strengthen veins to maintain fluid balance. Look for products standardized to 20 percent escin and follow package directions. Horse chestnut seed extract might interfere with blood-thinning medications, such as Coumadin, increasing the risk of bleeding. Avoid the herb if you are pregnant or breastfeeding.

What are your thoughts on using urine as a treatment?

I don't recommend it. Urine therapy, also known as urotherapy and autourotherapy, involves using your own urine to treat various ailments. The idea remains popular in Japan as an alternative cancer therapy.

Applying urine to the skin is a folk remedy for easing athlete's foot and jellyfish stings, and even for improving complexions. These external uses appear harmless and may be effective, but I do have a problem with the idea of drinking urine. Proponents claim that urine contains small antibodies, and reintroducing them to the body helps it recognize and combat illness, curing everything from sore throats, colds, and asthma to alcoholism, cancer, and AIDS. I consider urine to be a waste product your body wants to get rid of, and there's no good evidence to support consuming it. I believe the therapy's reported benefits are likely placebo effects that result from breaking the powerful psychological taboo against drinking urine. **SP**

Send your health questions or "My Take" topics to Ask Dr. Weil, Self Healing, 42 Pleasant St., Watertown MA 02472.

Good for You!

Car Yoga: The Road to Relaxation

Loosen up during long holiday drives with this exercise from longtime yoga instructor Ganga White. He calls it a "snaking practice," and these movements helped keep his spine from cramping and tightening while motoring thousands of miles.

"Use your grip on the steering wheel along with a gentle press of the heels for support and snake your spine around by rocking your pelvis forward and backward, side to side, and in clockwise and counterclockwise circles. As you do this, let these motions translate up and down the entire spine. A few minutes of this practice lubricates and hydrates the spinal disks and releases compression and tension. Similarly, twist your pelvis from side to side a few times and then roll your shoulders in circles. These movements can transform a road trip from a body-stressing event of spinal compression to a body-balancing yoga session. Obviously you must be attentive and should not do anything that compromises your driving abilities."

Source: *Yoga Beyond Belief: Insights to Awaken and Deepen Your Practice* by Ganga White (North Atlantic Books, 2007)

New! The Healthy Brain Kit

Boost your memory (brochure enclosed).

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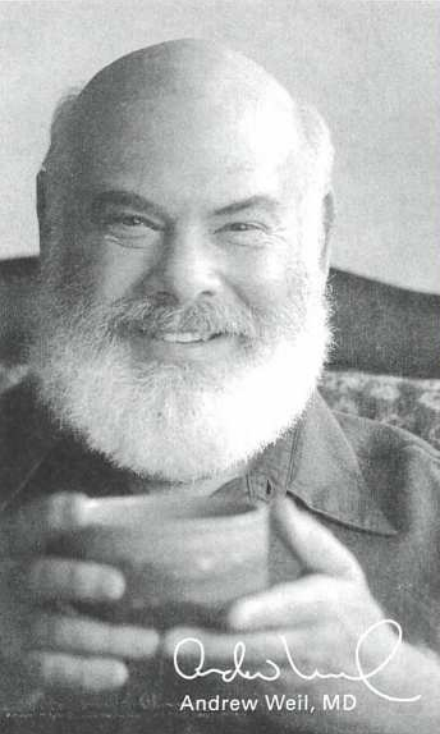
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Mindful Eating

Mushroom Cookery

Choosing Yogurt

The Newest Foods



Andrew Weil
Andrew Weil, MD

TIPS FOR LIVING WELL

■ A mug of natural **COCOA** has nearly twice the antioxidants of a glass of red wine, two to three times more than green tea, and up to five times that of black tea.

■ Most people have **10,000** taste buds. Around midlife, taste buds are replaced more slowly. That's why tastes may change as people grow older and retain fewer working taste buds.

■ Baby-cut **carrots** don't grow that way; they're regular carrots shaped by machine into bite-size pieces. A farmer created them to use up his misshapen carrots.

■ More body **heat** does not escape from your head in frigid weather than from other areas. A bare head loses less heat than an uncovered leg or arm because less skin is exposed to the cold.

■ **Beverages** account for roughly half the excess calories Americans consume. Since the brain finds liquid calories less satisfying than chewing on food, replacing sugary drinks with water is a simple way to help shed pounds.

Dr. Andrew Weil's

self healing

CREATING OPTIMUM HEALTH FOR YOUR BODY AND SOUL

SPECIAL ISSUE: Diet & Food

FEBRUARY 2007

Four Essential Tips for Mindful Eating

When I was a kid, no one got buckets of movie popcorn, drank Big Gulps, or ate oversized muffins.

Bigger portion sizes play a major role in Americans' expanding waistlines. Yet, people are often unaware of the many factors that influence how much they eat, argues Brian Wansink, PhD, director of Cornell University's Food and Brand Lab, in his book *Mindless Eating: Why We Eat More Than We Think* (Bantam, 2006). Here are four simple ways to consciously curb overeating, drawn from Wansink's research.

1 Use smaller dishes and taller glasses.

In one study, nutrition experts given large bowls to serve themselves took 31 percent more ice cream than those given medium-size bowls. When big bowls were paired with big spoons, they took 57 percent more than with smaller bowls and spoons. In another study, teens given a tall, skinny glass poured about 5.5 ounces, while those with a short, wide glass poured an average of 9.6 ounces, or 74 percent more. Your brain tends to focus on an object's height, not its width, so it's easy to overpour when using a wide glass. *Tip:* Use medium-size plates so reasonable portions don't look like appetizers, and consider getting rid of your wide drinking glasses.

2 Hide tempting foods. Researchers gave secretaries covered dishes with 30 chocolate Hershey's Kisses. Half of the dishes were clear, and the other half were white so the chocolates weren't visible if the lid was on. Secretaries given clear dishes ate an average of 7.7 Kisses daily, while those given white dishes ate 4.6—a difference of 77 calories. In other research, secretaries kept dishes of chocolates in different locations. The typical secretary ate nine chocolates a day if the dish was on her desk, six if the dish was in a desk drawer, and four if the dish was six feet away. *Tip:* Store all tempting foods in the back of the fridge

or cupboard. At mealtimes, keep serving dishes in the kitchen, not on the dinner table, to avoid reaching for seconds.

3 Beware of "health halos." People often overeat what they think is healthy, says Wansink. In one study, participants were given granola in bags labeled "low fat" or "regular" to munch on while watching a video. (All the granola was actually low in fat.) Those eating what they *thought* was low fat ate 49 percent more, which translated into 84 additional calories. Low-fat labels seem to have a stronger influence on overweight people: When offered low-fat chocolate, they ate 46 percent more than when it had a regular label, while slimmer people ate only 16 percent more. *Tip:* Check calories on food labels; many reduced-fat products have extra sugar and similar calorie counts as regular versions.

4 Know when to stop eating. One reason "French women don't get fat" is they stay attuned to feelings of fullness. Wansink's team asked Parisians and Chicagoans how they decided it was time to stop eating a meal. Parisians quit when they no longer felt hungry, but Chicagoans stopped when they ran out of a beverage, or when their plate was empty, or when a TV show was over. *Tip:* Pay more attention to internal cues, such as whether you feel full, and less to external cues, such as how much food is left on your plate.

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HEALTH IN THE NEWS

Use Your Head to Lessen Back Pain

Your mind can be a powerful tool to ease chronic low back pain, suggests a review study that analyzed data from 22 clinical trials. Researchers found that psychological approaches can be more valuable than conventional methods, especially for reducing pain intensity. Psychological approaches also helped improve quality of life, mood, and job-related disability. Cognitive-behavioral therapy and mind-body techniques such as relaxation, biofeedback, and self-hypnosis were found to work best. These cost-effective treatments seem to produce better outcomes than back surgeries, drugs, and other procedures. (*Health Psychology*, January 2007)

Comment ▶ These results are consistent with the ideas I've long promoted from John Sarno, MD, who has emphasized the importance of mind-body interactions on chronic back pain. For more, see his book *Healing Back Pain* (Warner, 1991) or purchase *Self Healing's* special report on low back pain.

Massage Eases Knee Arthritis

Regular massages may lessen symptoms and improve the course of arthritis. In a recent study involving 68 patients with knee osteoarthritis, those receiving a one-hour Swedish massage twice a week for four weeks, followed by a massage once a week for another month, reported less pain and had improved flexibility and range of motion. And the effects may last: Eight weeks after the massages ended, many still felt the benefits. (*Archives of Internal Medicine*, December 11–25, 2006)

Comment ▶ I often recommend massage therapy to reduce arthritic pain caused by inflammation. It's a low-cost treatment with little risk and can also be a great therapy when paired with acupuncture or more conventional arthritis treatments.

Train Your Brain to Stay Sharp

Just like your body, your brain also needs exercise. A study found that older people who received brain training stayed mentally sharp for years afterward. Researchers divided more than 2,800 adults with an average age of 74 into four groups: One group received no training, while the others received between 10 and 18 hours of training for memory, reasoning, or speed of thinking. After five years, people who received brain training had improved cognitive function and were more capable of performing daily activities compared to the control group. (*Journal of the American Medical Association*, December 20, 2006)

Comment ▶ Most people don't receive any memory training as they age, but the brain can always learn. Do activities that challenge your mind as you get older, such as card games, word puzzles, reading, or playing an instrument. For more tips, see the *Healthy Brain Kit* I put together with neuroscientist Gary Small, MD.

Gastric Reflux Drugs Linked to Hip Fractures

Long-term use of proton pump inhibitors (PPIs), popular medications that block stomach acid production and are prescribed for gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD), may increase the odds of a broken hip. A review of medical records from nearly 150,000 Britons aged 50 or older found that those who used a PPI for more than a year had a 44 percent higher risk of hip fracture than nonusers; the risk was greater at higher doses. PPIs may affect bone health by inhibiting calcium absorption. (*Journal of the American Medical Association*, December 27, 2006)

Comment ▶ I've long said these drugs are not benign and are not safe for long-term use. I prefer natural approaches that include avoiding trigger foods, practicing relaxation, and taking the licorice extract DGL.

Is Breakfast Essential for Most Adults?

I enjoy breakfast and feel it gives me the energy needed to start my day, but I know many people who skip a morning meal because they aren't hungry or don't believe it's necessary. Studies show that children and people with blood sugar problems should eat soon after they wake, but evidence that healthy adults need what's been called "the most important meal of the day" is inconclusive.

Theoretically, breakfast will give your brain energy and may help stabilize blood sugar and insulin levels. But if you have frequent small meals throughout the day, holding off on eating until a few hours after you get out of bed shouldn't be a problem. However, if you're trying to lose some weight, you may want to fit in breakfast: Some studies suggest that people who eat breakfast tend to lose more weight than those who don't, but what you eat throughout the day may be more important than boosting your metabolism in the AM. "Fat-metabolizing enzymes do not go away overnight and can handle a wide range of patterns of food intake," explains nutritionist Marion Nestle, PhD, a lifelong breakfast skipper and author of *What to Eat* (North Point Press, 2006). "Calories are the real issue and it doesn't matter when you eat them."

Experiment with what works best for you. My typical breakfast includes a bowl of matcha tea, 1/2 cup of frozen organic berries (thawed), and a slice of whole grain bread with baked, pressed tofu or smoked salmon. But breakfast doesn't have to be traditional or routine: Sometimes I'll have leftovers instead. In general, I try to get 30 percent of my calories from fat, 50 percent from carbohydrates, and 20 percent protein at the morning meal.



Andrew Weil, MD

AM Meals to Go

- Pack breakfast the night before. Fresh fruit with nuts and cheese, or a hard-boiled egg and plain yogurt with organic berries, travel well.
- For a quick shake, just blend 1/2 cake of silken tofu, 1/2 cup apple juice, 1 cup organic strawberries, and a banana.

His and Her Weight Loss: 4 Key Differences

Both men and women struggle with losing weight, but their approaches to girth control and their biology are not the same. Some gender differences:

Physical. Men generally have the potential to lose weight more easily or faster because they have more muscle mass, says Jim Nicolai, MD, medical director of the Franciscan Center for Integrative Health in Indianapolis. The first thing he tells the women he sees who want to lose weight is they must do some strength training in addition to aerobic activity. His rationale? "Strength training builds up the machinery to burn fat." Before menopause, hormones steer fat toward women's thighs and hips for childbearing; after menopause, fat favors the belly and upper body.

Emotional. Men have a different emotional response to food and their triggers for eating are different, suggests Karen Miller-Kovach, chief scientific officer of Weight Watchers and author of the forthcoming book *She Loses, He Loses: The Truth about*

Women, Men, and Weight Loss (Wiley, 2007). "Men tend to eat because of positive emotions, like when they're happy or in social situations. Women are more likely to eat in response to negative emotions, such as sadness, boredom, or stress."

Behavioral. Both sexes tend to overestimate physical activity and underestimate caloric intake. Yet, Weight Watchers research revealed a surprising finding: Women and men have completely different languages about weight loss (see box). As Miller-Kovach says, women tend to be bottom-up thinkers: They want to know the how and whys of losing weight, such as counting calories and meal planning. "Men are top-down thinkers. Their eyes glaze over when you talk calories; they want to be told what to do."

Motivational. Women might lose weight for appearance's sake, while men slim down for health or fitness reasons. But an attitudinal shift is under way that's more age related than gender based. Weight Watchers

found that men under the age of 45 placed more importance on losing weight to look better, while men and women over 45 cited feeling better. Women are more likely to shed extra pounds for preventive reasons, while men take action once there's a health problem, such as hypertension or arthritis, explains Miller-Kovach. 

He Said, She Said

- Women speak of dieting. Men rarely use this term and might feel uncomfortable if told to diet. Men say they're getting in shape.
- Women talk of food cravings; men say, "I'm in the mood for."
- Instead of suggesting their male partners are sabotaging their weight loss plan, women should specify the support they need: "When you bring home ice cream, it's a problem for me. Can you help me with that?"

Cooking with Mushrooms

I always look forward to tasting new edible mushrooms. Each species has a unique texture and flavor. Besides mushrooms' power to fight infection and help prevent disease, these culinary delights are also rich in antioxidants, fiber, and protein. Plus, they're low in fat and a good source of B and D vitamins.

Below is a guide to seven popular cooking mushrooms, beginning with the least expensive and most available kinds. If you can't find them at your local grocer, check Asian or farmers' markets, food coops, or health food stores. Most are available fresh year-round or dried. Look for young mushrooms (see descriptions below or ask your grocer), because they have a better texture and will keep longer. They'll stay fresh for up to a week if refrigerated in a paper bag. Since mushrooms are 90 percent water, it's best to clean them by scrubbing dirt off with a soft, dry brush before cooking rather than washing them. If you have trouble getting the dirt off, briefly rinse in water, dry with a paper towel, and cook.

All of the following mushrooms can be frozen after cooking. First, sauté, broil, or barbeque mushrooms with a little olive oil and desired herbs. (Olive oil helps prevent freezer

burn.) Then place them in an airtight container and freeze. When ready to use, thaw and eat within two hours to prevent the mushrooms from becoming mushy.

Dried varieties have a more intense flavor than fresh fungi and maintain their nutritional value. To prepare dried mushrooms for cooking, soak each ounce of mushrooms in one cup of water for a half-hour. Two ounces of dried mushrooms equals about one pound of fresh. I'd avoid canned varieties, which typically lack flavor.

Portobello (*Agaricus bisporus* or *Agaricus brunnescens*).

This species, which includes white "button" mushrooms, large portobello caps, and criminis (baby portobellos), contains natural carcinogens that mostly break down with high heat. I advise against eating a lot of these mushrooms and you should never consume them raw.

Hints: Broil these mushrooms at 415 °F for 10 minutes to destroy the toxins, suggests Paul Stamets, owner of Fungi Perfecti (fungi.com) in Washington State and the author of several books on mushrooms.

Shiitake (*Lentinula edodes*). I'm a big fan of this mushroom's meaty flavor and versatility, as is Stamets, who enjoys them almost daily. In addition to having antiviral and anti-cancer compounds, shiitakes help lower cholesterol. They have fleshy brown, slightly convex caps that range in diameter from 2 to 10 inches, but generally less than 6 inches.

Hints: Shiitakes are great in soups and stir-fries and can be baked or grilled with a little tamari and sesame oil. First discard stems, then slice caps and sauté. Stamets likes to prepare shiitakes with caramelized onions: Place 1/2 pound shiitakes and one medium chopped onion in a medium-hot pan with a tablespoon of olive oil. Cover pan for the first 15 minutes to preserve flavor, adding a splash of tamari after the first five minutes. Remove lid and cook five to 10 minutes longer (add another splash of tamari five minutes before mushrooms are done), or until they're a deep golden brown with dark brown edges.

Porcini (*Boletus edulis*). Also known as cèpe, this is one of the most sought-after and versatile mushrooms with a sweet and nutty flavor. The dark brown 3- to 8-inch round cap sits on a thick stem and becomes flatter as it ages.

Hints: Porcinis do well with olive oil and garlic. Broil mushrooms, flipping them every five minutes, then slice thinly. If using dried porcinis, preserve the liquid used for soaking them as a base for soups or sauces: The mushrooms and broth are especially good for mushroom barley soup.

Maitake (*Grifola frondosa*). Also called "hen of the woods" because it grows in big, brown clusters that resemble the fowl's tail, this mushroom has a mild flavor and excellent texture. Maitakes have anti-cancer, antiviral, and immune-enhancing effects and may also help control high blood pressure and blood sugar levels. Stamets suggests purchasing young maitakes, because they are denser than older ones.

Hints: This mushroom has a tough stem that's better sliced, while the petal-like caps are better chopped. Cook these fungi as you would shiitakes.

Porcini Risotto

This simple dish from my book *Eating Well for Optimum Health* (Quill/HarperCollins, 2001) also tastes great with shiitakes or criminis.

- Rinse dried mushrooms in cold water, drain, and add to warm vegetable stock to soften.
- In a large skillet, heat olive oil over medium heat and sauté onion until soft. Add rice and stir to combine. Add mushrooms, cut into smaller pieces if necessary. Reduce heat to medium-low.
- Add stock, one ladleful at a time, as you stir the rice. As rice absorbs liquid, add more. After 15 minutes, test rice for doneness.
- When rice is tender but not mushy, remove from heat. Salt and pepper to taste. Add truffle-flavored olive oil and grated Parmesan cheese, if desired. Serves 4.

INGREDIENTS

- 1/2 cup dried porcini mushrooms
- 3 to 4 cups warm vegetable stock
- 1 tablespoon extra-virgin olive oil
- 1 small onion, minced
- 1 cup Arborio rice
- salt and pepper to taste
- 2 teaspoons truffle-flavored olive oil (optional)
- 1/2 cup grated fresh Parmesan cheese (optional)

PER SERVING

calories	411
carbohydrates	70 g
protein	12 g
fat	9 g
fiber	2.5 g

Enoki (*Flammulina velutipes*). These long-stemmed, delicate pinhead mushrooms have a sweet and nutty flavor. A compound in enoki called flammulin shows significant anti-tumor activity. Enokis should be used fresh. Choose firm, ivory-colored bunches. They are usually imported in vacuum-packed bags and have a long shelf life.

Hints: Enokis are good in salads, soups, stews, broth, or added to stir-fries with vegetables, chicken, or fish. Cook with stems on or dice them. For salads, blanch in boiling water for 30 seconds.

Lion's Mane (*Hericium erinaceus*). Used in Chinese medicine to treat gastrointestinal problems, lion's mane also contains compounds called erinacines that stimulate the growth of nerve cells. This mushroom looks like a white spiny pom-pom and can grow to the size of a baseball or larger.

Hints: Cooking can sometimes make lion's mane sour,

warns Stamets, who suggests soaking these mushrooms in sake for 15 to 30 minutes (this turns them a blue-green) and adding a splash of tamari before slicing and sautéing (mushrooms will be light brown after cooking). Add a sliver of butter before serving to enhance their lobster-like flavor.

Pioppino (*Agrocybe aegerita*). Also known as the black poplar mushroom because it grows around that tree, this mushroom has a nutty flavor. Its light brown, semi-round caps rest on thin white stems. The gills are whitish when young, becoming darker with age.

Hints: Pioppinos work well with a variety of rice, risotto, and meat dishes. To enjoy them on their own, chop stems and caps into small cubes and sauté with salt and olive oil. "This creates the crunch factor, which is best for pioppinos," says Stamets. "When you bite into one, it breaks apart with a burst of flavor." **SP**

Yogurts Galore: The Culture Club Keeps Growing

If the yogurt case in your store seems to be expanding, it probably is. Between 1980 and 2005, yogurt production in the United States grew fivefold, approaching 3 billion pounds a year. Drinkable and squeezable yogurts (often heavily sweetened) are occupying more shelf space, and manufacturers continue to introduce new variations of this ancient food. Here I'll discuss some recent additions.

Specific health benefits. Yogurt has long had a reputation as a healthy food thanks to the *Lactobacillus acidophilus* or other "friendly" bacteria, also known as probiotics, in many products. (Look for a "Live & Active Cultures" seal on labels.) Yogurts are now marketed for particular health concerns. Dannon makes Activia,

which is supposed to relieve constipation if you consume one 4-ounce container daily for two weeks, as well as DanActive, a cultured probiotic drink that claims to boost immunity if you drink a 3.3-ounce bottle daily. Sandy Newmark, MD, a pediatrician at the Program in Integrative Medicine who's knowledgeable about probiotics, says there are preliminary studies backing the claims for these products. Yet, it's not clear they are worth the higher price, because other research suggests yogurt in general tends to have similar benefits.

Expect to see more yogurts with added omega-3 fatty acids. But you'll need other sources of these good fats to meet my usual recommendation: 1,000 mg of omega-3s per day from food or supplements.

Unusual milks. Many health food stores stock yogurts made from the (usually whole) milk of goats, sheep, and water buffalo. These yogurts, sold plain or flavored, are said to be less problematic for people who are lactose-intolerant. (Yogurt from soy milk is also an option.) Compared to cow's milk yogurt, goat's milk yogurt is lower in fat and has a lighter texture, while sheep and water buffalo milk yogurts are higher in fat and creamier. All are good sources of protein and calcium (see box).

Old World offerings. Most commercial yogurts are a far cry from traditional yogurt in Greece, Turkey, and the Middle East, which is tangier and isn't thickened with additives like modified starch, gums, or gelatin. I'm pleased Greek-style yogurt is becoming more available here: It's strained to remove liquid whey, creating a sour-cream consistency. You can eat it plain or add honey and walnuts. Greek yogurts range from full-fat to nonfat varieties.

Added to cereals. Several cereals boast they're yogurt-coated, but the powdered yogurt in them is typically heat-treated, which kills any good bacteria. Coatings may also include extra calories from sugar and palm kernel oil. For a healthier option, mix cereal with plain nonfat or low-fat yogurt rather than milk. **SP**

	Calories	Fat	Protein	Sugar	Calcium (% Daily Value)
Nonfat yogurt	80	0 g	8 g	11 g	30%
Whole-milk yogurt	130	6 g	8 g	11 g	25%
Greek-style yogurt (nonfat)	90	0 g	15 g	7 g	10%
Greek-style yogurt (whole milk)	225	17 g	11 g	5 g	15%
Goat's milk yogurt	95	5 g	6 g	3 g	15%
Sheep's milk yogurt	140	8 g	10 g	3 g	30%
Water buffalo milk yogurt	150	12 g	6 g	3 g	25%
Soy yogurt	125	3 g	6 g	12 g	15–30%

Note: These figures are for 6 ounces of plain yogurt.

What's New at the Supermarket? 7 Recent Trends

Innovation drives the food industry—21,000 new products appeared on grocers' shelves in 2006, of which 2,900 were considered organic. But staying on supermarket shelves and getting into shoppers' carts is the ongoing struggle. About 90 percent of new food products fail. So food manufacturers are constantly looking for new products with some longevity, explains Marc Halperin, culinary director and principal of the Center for Culinary Development, a San Francisco firm that develops new foods and tracks food industry trends.

Consumers' food buying preferences are shaped largely by taste and convenience, but increasingly by concerns about health. With thousands of new food products coming and going, it's hard to keep track of them all. This past year saw the debut of salad dressing sprays, "stomach-friendly" (low-acid) coffees, and yogurt-coated cereals. Below I'll offer my opinion of some other new food items and trends.

Whole-grain goodness. When 2005 Dietary Guidelines advised Americans to eat more whole grains, manufacturers responded. They created a spate of whole grain products from chocolate chip cookies and chips to cereals and snack foods so it's easier to get at least three daily servings. But just because a food says "whole grain" or "multigrain" doesn't make it wholesome, and these terms may be misleading. Many of these products have high glycemic loads and are only marginally better than refined flour versions. I'd rather see people consume actual whole grains in their natural state, such as brown rice, barley, bulgur, and quinoa, than eat more flour products, whether white or whole wheat.

The Next Big Things

In 2007, I anticipate continued growth for organics, bar foods, antioxidant drinks, dark chocolate, and teas. These are Halperin's predictions:

- probiotics in yogurts, dairy drinks, and cereals
- gluten-free foods
- nonsugar sweeteners like agave and palm sugars
- "healthier" snack foods
- pink, grey, and black salts

White whole-wheat flour. While many consumers know that foods made from 100 percent whole-wheat flour is more nutritious than more refined varieties, some don't like the taste—or the color. Enter "white wheat," the principal type of wheat grown in Australia, as an alternative to red wheat, the common US strain that gives us whole-wheat and white flours, depending on whether it's milled with or without the grain's bran and germ. Companies claim that white wheat, now bred here, marries white bread's taste with whole grains' health benefits and nutrient profile. Previously available for commercial use in bread products, you can now find the flour for home baking. As I mentioned above, I recommend eating more true whole grains and fewer flour products.

Portion-control packaging. Single-serve packages, often billed as 100-calorie packs, offer smaller portions of treats (cookies, crackers, candy, and snacks) and sodas. Yogurts and cheeses have also joined this successful bandwagon. But I'm not convinced that these are good teaching tools for portion control, and depending on the ingredients, you're better off avoiding them. I think the number of calories they contain is less important than the products themselves. Halperin explains that the industry views snack packs as a low-cost way to respond to consumer interest in portion sizing while also addressing concerns about good health and obesity. "It's excellent marketing because the product itself hasn't really changed, just the packaging has."

Pyramid-shaped tea bags. What was once familiar only to connoisseurs of high-end teas is now available to the masses with Lipton's launch of its triangular tea bags. First developed by the Japanese to house its finest loose-leaf teas, the three-sided pouch lets you see the whole leaves and gives them more room to expand. Instead of using paper, Lipton created a nylon mesh bag while other tea companies might use silk or muslin. While triangular bags are pricier, I see the advantages: Manufacturers often use better quality tea in these bags and brewing is easy.

A flood of bottled waters. As consumers favor the clear drink over sodas, there's been a deluge of waters. Manufacturers need an edge to stand out, so they've introduced H₂O that claims to be purified, oxygenated, caffeinated, flavored, distilled, electrolyte-enhanced, fitness-formulated, or fortified with vitamins and minerals. Water is definitely big business, but I suggest you read ingredients labels to see whether the beverage warrants its higher price. I prefer my own home water filtration system and drink bottled brands when traveling. No one has cracked the code for success, explains Halperin, "but manufacturers have offered more interesting ways for consumers to enjoy drinking water and enough variety to get them to buy it."

Antioxidants galore. First the blueberry claimed the spotlight, and then the pomegranate. Next, mangosteen fruit, noni, açai berry, and goji berry all vied to be the antioxidant "superfruit" in the juice aisle. (One clever manufacturer created mangoni juice, by blending mangosteen, goji, and noni fruits.) With no outright flavor winner, you can even find coffee, cereals, and orange juice laced with antioxidants. I think the race to be the next super-antioxidant fruit is a game looking for a marketing angle: Most products don't offer advantages over more familiar and less expensive fruits like berries. But if you like the taste, enjoy them.

Green tea in everything. Besides being sold as a powdered drink mix, instant green tea has found its way into ice cream, breakfast cereals, and baking mixes. I've even seen it listed on the labels of energy bars. I'm not opposed to green tea's increasing use here; it's been a food ingredient in Japan for years in candies and cookies. But not everyone is sold on the polyphenol-laden beverage. Green tea is not a mainstream flavor, suggests Halperin, who says many find the taste too foreign. **SP**

Ask Dr. Weil Whole Grains; Smart Balance; Tea; and More

Eating refined sugars makes my depression worse. Are there other foods I should avoid? Are there any that may ease symptoms?

There is no single diet for treating depression, but there are some options you can try. I suggest eating more fish, because an increased intake of omega-3 fatty acids, from both foods and supplements, has been linked to improvements in depression. Decreasing your intake of omega-6 fatty acids by limiting polyunsaturated vegetable oils (corn, safflower, and sunflower) may also help since omega-6s can reduce absorption of omega-3s. Tryptophan, an amino acid found in turkey, chicken, cheese, and eggs, may help improve mood by boosting levels of the neurotransmitter serotonin. Also, less-refined carbohydrates like whole grains, beans, and sweet potatoes can raise serotonin levels without creating the unhealthy swings in blood sugar you'd get from eating refined carbs.

However, I wouldn't rely solely on diet to increase serotonin since the boost you might get is only temporary. Regular aerobic exercise may be more important than diet to affect brain levels of serotonin and other neurotransmitters that help regulate mood. I'd also avoid caffeine, which can cause mood swings, and alcohol, which is a depressant. Alcohol can also interact with some antidepressants.

Are Smart Balance spreads a good alternative to butter?

If I had to choose, I'd pick butter over margarines like Smart Balance that are mostly unhealthy fat and highly processed. Using small amounts of butter occasionally probably won't hurt you. Even though Smart Balance may be better for you than regular margarine because it lacks trans fats, it replaces trans fats with palm oil, which is high in saturated fat.

Smart Balance contains an equal blend of polyunsaturated, monounsaturated, and saturated fats and claims to improve your cholesterol ratio by lowering "bad" LDL and raising "good"

HDL. In company-sponsored studies, people whose diets included a similar ratio of fats improved their cholesterol levels, but that doesn't mean this mix of fats is ideal. Instead, I recommend drizzling extra-virgin olive oil—a healthier, monounsaturated fat with beneficial antioxidants—on your bread or using Spectrum Naturals spread. This spread is made from expeller-pressed canola oil, another monounsaturated fat. It has a buttery flavor and is available in the refrigerated section of most natural food stores.

Which tea is healthier: white or green? Are decaffeinated green teas as good as caffeinated varieties?

Both white and green teas are healthy choices, but the white variety has a higher content of polyphenols (antioxidant compounds) because it's the least processed of all teas. In a test-tube study, white tea inhibited DNA mutations (an early step in cancer formation) more effectively than green, while another study found it reduced the number of precancerous colon lesions in rats. It's also been shown in tests to have antiviral effects and may be better at boosting immunity than other teas. Still, green

tea has been better researched, with studies suggesting it may help prevent a host of cancers, lower cholesterol, and fight inflammation. I find green tea has a more robust and interesting flavor than white. Also, white tea can be more difficult to find and is quite expensive. While I enjoy white tea occasionally, I prefer drinking green tea for regular use.

Both teas are naturally caffeinated, but if you like decaffeinated beverages, the antioxidant levels are the same in caffeinated and decaffeinated versions. However, commercially decaffeinated teas tend to be low in quality. I suggest decaffeinating good-quality tea yourself by steeping leaves in hot water for about 30 seconds. Caffeine is highly water-soluble, so most of it will be released into the water. Pour off and discard this liquid. Add fresh hot water to the tea leaves and steep as usual.

What's your take on alkalizing diets?

Some of the food recommendations are sensible and it's generally a healthy diet. But I don't agree with the acid-base principle as a rationale for eating this way. Supporters of alkalizing diets, sometimes called pH

continued on next page

MY TAKE ON The Master Cleanse

The "master cleanse," or lemonade diet, has resurfaced in Hollywood as a weight loss aid. However, this cleanse, which natural healer Stanley Burroughs created in the 1940s and wrote about in *The Master Cleanser* (Burroughs, 1976), was intended to eliminate toxins from the body, not shed pounds.

The cleanse, which lasts 10 days or longer, consists of drinking 6 to 12 glasses daily of a mixture of lemon or lime juice, maple syrup, cayenne pepper, and spring or purified water. It provides about a third of the calories an average adult needs a day. As a result, a significant amount of weight may be lost, but the pounds seldom stay off. I did this cleanse occasionally in the '70s and found the drink very satisfying. Burroughs and others claim that regular cleansing is necessary to eliminate disease, and some people report relief from various ailments, including joint pain and high blood pressure, but there's no scientific proof that this cleanse is responsible.

BOTTOM LINE I think it's fine to do a 10-day cleanse once or twice a year if you're trying to give your GI system a break, but it's absolutely not a magic bullet for lasting weight loss. Anyone with insulin sensitivity or other serious health conditions should avoid this type of cleansing. ☞

diets or acid-base diets, suggest limiting animal protein, sugar, caffeine, and processed foods. I agree, but not because I think you should eat fewer "acidic" foods and more alkaline ones, as defined by these diets. Proponents also restrict some fruits, whole grains, legumes, and healthy oils based on the theory that these foods make the body's pH levels too acidic, which they claim raises the risk for diabetes, arthritis, cancer, and other conditions. I know of no human studies that show this diet helps prevent or treat chronic disease.

While it's true that animal protein increases the acidity of the blood, it does so only slightly. Fruits and vegetables can make blood more alkaline. Although this changes the pH levels in your body, it's for a short time. Even if you ate a large amount of an alkalinizing food, such as broccoli, your blood pH levels wouldn't change enough to have an appreciable effect. The body has a tight regulatory system to keep pH levels within a healthy range: 7.35 to 7.45. Don't worry about measuring your pH levels, because they aren't greatly influenced by food or drink.

Are whole grains better than foods with whole grain flour, and are these better than whole wheat?

Eating whole grains in their natural state is generally better than eating something labeled whole grain flour or whole wheat. Whole grains contain all three parts of a grain: the bran, the endosperm, and the germ. The bran has a high percentage of fiber, while the germ contains healthy fats and vitamin E. The endosperm contains most of the calories in the form of starch. When grains are milled, the starch is pulverized, creating a large surface area for digestive enzymes to work on. The resulting rapid conversion to starch and sugar causes spikes in blood sugar and insulin secretion.

Although whole grain flour is slightly better than eating white flour, I suggest eating fewer products made with flour of any kind and eating more whole or cracked grain, such as wild rice, barley, and quinoa. Many products say they contain "whole grain flour" or "whole grain," but in fact are made from pulverized grains, not intact ones.

When buying bread, look for visible pieces of grain. If you can crush a slice of bread into a marble-sized ball, it has a high glycemic load, whether it looks brown or white. Low-glycemic-load breads are dense and chewy and full of cracked pieces of grains. Although you may see labels that say "made with whole grains," be wary because these products may be made with flour.

At 25, I've been diagnosed with low estrogen. Can I adjust my diet to get more of the hormone and avoid taking birth control pills?

Yes, dietary changes can help. There's not a lot of information on what causes young women to have low estrogen, but excessive exercising, low body weight, and eating disorders can affect the pituitary gland, resulting in low estrogen and increasing the risk of osteoporosis. To treat nutritionally, I suggest eating more foods containing phytoestrogens, including soy, beans, and freshly ground flaxseed. Phytoestrogens are plant chemicals with a similar structure to estrogen that can help moderate hormonal imbalances by mimicking estrogen's effects in the body. We don't yet know if phytoestrogens are safe in the concentrated doses found in soy extracts or powders, but I think one or two servings of whole soy foods a day is a good idea.

You could also try taking the tonic herb dong quai on a daily basis. It has long been used in China for female reproductive system disorders. Take two capsules of the root or a dropperful of the tincture in a little water twice a day, giving it a six- to eight-week trial. Or you could visit a practitioner of traditional Chinese medicine for a comprehensive treatment program. **SP**

Send your health questions or "My Take" topics to Ask Dr. Weil, Self Healing, 42 Pleasant St., Watertown MA 02472.

Good for You!

Healthy and Homemade Hot Chocolates

Warm up with these delicious drinks featuring dark chocolate or natural cocoa powder, both packed with antioxidants.

"Keep Your Heart Pumping" Hot Chocolate. Chop 2 ounces dark chocolate (at least 70 percent cacao). Pour 1 cup vanilla-flavored soy milk into a saucepan and place over medium heat. Bring to just under a boil; look for small bubbles on the pan's sides. Remove from heat. Whisk in chocolate until melted. Return to heat and whisk in 2 teaspoons sugar, if desired, and 1 teaspoon ground cinnamon. Simmer, whisking, for another minute. Pour into mugs. Serves 2.

Guiltless Soy Milk Hot Cocoa. Pour 2 cups soy milk into a saucepan and place over medium-high heat. Bring to just under a boil. Reduce heat and whisk in 2 tablespoons natural cocoa powder. Simmer for 2 to 3 minutes. Remove from heat and whisk in 1 teaspoon pure vanilla extract. Pour into mugs and add honey to taste. Serves 2.

Source: Hot Chocolate: 50 Heavenly Cups of Comfort by Fred Thompson (Harvard Common Press, 2006). Used by permission from the publisher.

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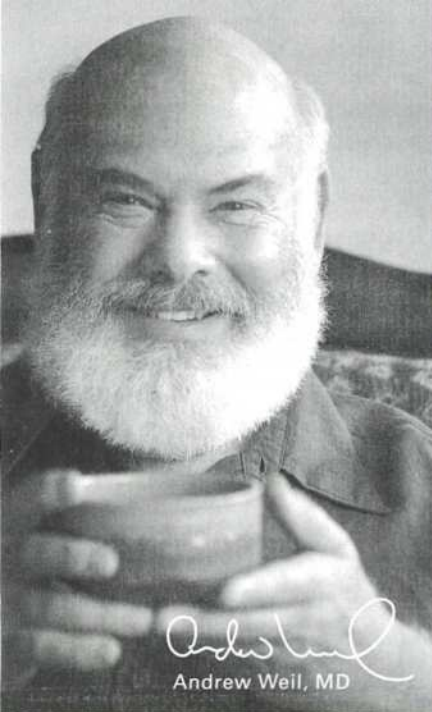
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Strength Training

Poultry Shopping

Probiotic Supplements

Adult ADHD



Andrew Weil, MD

Dr. Andrew Weil's

MARCH 2007

self healing

CREATING OPTIMUM HEALTH FOR YOUR BODY AND SOUL

TIPS

FOR LIVING WELL

■ Try a **pomelo**, a large grapefruit relative with a sweeter flesh. And taste a blood orange: Its red flesh is rich in the same pigments found in berries. Both fruits are in season and boost vitamin C.

■ When you **stretch**, you may favor your more flexible side. On odd-numbered days, switch this up: Work on the tighter side first to balance out your body.

■ **Wrinkles** were reduced by less than 10 percent in a recent *Consumer Reports* study of nine wrinkle creams. The cream's price wasn't linked to its effectiveness.

■ Adding **milk** to a cup of black tea reduces the beverage's heart-healthy benefits, says one small study. Proteins in milk may neutralize the antioxidant catechins in tea that are good for the cardiovascular system.

■ The top **fitness** trends for 2007 include time-efficient workouts, small-group personal training sessions, and more programs geared to older adults and kids. Balance building and functional strength will also be popular. 

Who Needs a Probiotic Supplement?

More than 400 different types of bacteria normally live in your gut. Although fewer than one percent are undesirable, your health can be compromised when the balance of these organisms is altered. I don't yet recommend that healthy people take a probiotic to obtain "friendly" bacteria the way I advise everyone to take a daily multivitamin, but here are some reasons to consider one.

Ease digestive disorders. Numerous studies suggest probiotics can ease the flatulence, irregular bowel movements, and abdominal pain from irritable bowel syndrome. Probiotics may also reduce symptoms of Crohn's disease. And people with ulcerative colitis who have part of their colon taken out may benefit from taking probiotics following surgery to prevent pouchitis, an inflammation of the intestine. Probiotics may be good for globetrotters too. A study of 245 travelers found that those who took a daily probiotic prior to and during their trip had about half the risk of experiencing traveler's diarrhea as those taking a placebo.

I advise anyone on antibiotics to take a probiotic daily to help prevent diarrhea. Sandy Newmark, MD, a pediatrician at the Program in Integrative Medicine, also recommends a daily probiotic to his patients with some conditions not usually associated with digestive disorders, such as autism.

Treat urogenital infections. Antibiotics can cause an imbalance of bacterial flora in the female genital tract, which can favor yeast and bacterial infections. Research is limited, but probiotics may be beneficial in treating vaginal infections, and a German study found them beneficial for treating chronic urinary tract infections in women.

Prevent allergies in children. Pregnant women with a family history of eczema or other allergies may want to take a probiotic in their last trimester, says Dr. Newmark. In one study, newborns given probiotics

their first six months and whose mothers took them the last few weeks of pregnancy had a reduced incidence of eczema. The helpful flora may help maintain a barrier in the newborns' intestines that when disturbed may favor development of allergies.

Here are tips for choosing probiotics:

1 Pick a hardy strain. Well-studied strains of *Lactobacillus* and *Bifidobacterium* survive stomach acid and reach the intestines. I often recommend *Lactobacillus GG*, and I'll be introducing a probiotic supplement later this year with *Bacillus coagulans*, another strain shown to contribute a large supply of healthy bacteria to the gut.

2 Look at the numbers. The amount of "colony forming units" (CFUs), or live organisms at the time of manufacturing, depends on the type of bacteria, but should be at least in the high millions. Heat, moisture, and oxygen can all affect the survival of bacteria, so do check the expiration date, explains Sheryl Berman, PhD, an immunologist at Bastyr University.

3 Consider the form. Probiotics come in tablets, capsules, powders, and a refrigerated liquid form. No one form has been identified as better than another. Casein-free and gluten-free varieties are available.

4 Don't worry about prebiotics. There is no good evidence that prebiotics, carbohydrate sources that bacteria use for food, are necessary, says Berman, who suggests eating a high-fiber diet instead. 

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HEALTH IN THE NEWS

Cynicism Influences Inflammation

A cynical outlook could harm your heart, hints data from more than 6,800 adults aged 45 to 84. Higher blood levels of three markers for inflammation in the body (C-reactive protein, interleukin-6, and fibrinogen) were seen in people who tend to be cynically distrustful when participants' mood, stress, and attitudes were evaluated over four years. Those who scored highest on chronic stress had elevated levels of two inflammatory markers, while depression upped one. Researchers suspect that inflammation may be the mechanism linking psychological factors to cardiovascular disease. (*Archives of Internal Medicine*, January 22, 2007)

Comment ▶ Previous studies have found links between temperament (like anger and hostility) and heart disease, but the reasons were unclear. Now this research offers some solid evidence that mental and emotional concerns can influence cardiac risk factors, such as inflammation, a point I've been making for years.

Cereal Fiber Helps Prevent Breast Cancer in Younger Women

Consuming higher amounts of dietary fiber in the decades before menopause seems to lower a woman's odds of breast cancer—a protective effect that's not seen after menopause, reports a UK study. After nearly 34,000 premenopausal and postmenopausal women were tracked for seven years, women eating 30 grams of fiber a day were found to have half the risk for breast cancer as those consuming 20 grams. Dietary fiber from cereals and possibly fruits appeared most likely to thwart breast cancer in younger women, perhaps by regulating estrogen. (*International Journal of Epidemiology*, January 24, 2007)

Comment ▶ This study shows a significant link between premenopausal incidence of breast cancer and high fiber intake. The earlier in life that women (and men) boost their fiber intake, the better it might be for their long-term cancer risk.

Acupressure Eases the Agitation of Dementia

Applying pressure with the hands to certain parts of the body, known as acupressure, may improve the quality of life for people with dementia and their caregivers, says a recent study. When 20 dementia patients received 15-minute acupressure sessions twice daily, five days a week, they had fewer episodes of agitated behavior, such as wandering and aggression. But once the four-week trial ended, agitation levels started to rise again. (*Journal of Clinical Nursing*, February 2007)

Comment ▶ Stimulating pressure points has been shown to reduce stress and increase alertness in healthy individuals, so I'm not surprised by these results. Acupressure is a low-cost and easily learned tool for caregivers that may also help dementia patients avoid or decrease the use of drugs to control agitated behavior.

Trans Fats Linked to Infertility

After reviewing data from 18,555 women with a history of infertility, researchers concluded that women who want to have children should avoid trans fats. They found that for every 2 percent of calories consumed from trans fats instead of monounsaturated fats like olive oil, the risk of ovulatory infertility doubled. Trans fats can interfere with the activity of a cell receptor involved in inflammation and glucose metabolism. Drugs that activate this receptor have been shown to improve fertility in women. (*American Journal of Clinical Nutrition*, January 2007)

Comment ▶ This study gives women one more reason to avoid these dangerous fats, which has become easier now that manufacturers must list them on packaged foods and more restaurants have eliminated them from menus.

Tighter System for Reporting Supplement Reactions

At the end of 2006, the Dietary Supplement and Non-Prescription Drug Consumer Protection Act was signed into law, creating a mandatory reporting system for all serious adverse events related to dietary supplements and over-the-counter drugs. I believe this new system will be an invaluable educational tool and provide information to assure consumers that dietary supplements are safe.

Currently, reports of events related to supplements are collected through poison control centers and the Food and Drug Administration's (FDA) system for prescription drugs. Up to this point, much of the data has not distinguished between a child eating a poisonous plant and a real adverse event from a dietary supplement, says Loren Israelsen, executive director of the United Natural Products Alliance. The new law will require dietary supplement companies to forward reports they receive of serious adverse events, such as a hospitalization or disability from the use of dietary supplements, to the FDA within 15 days. This is the same time frame for reporting prescription drug adverse events. The law further ensures quality reporting by making it illegal to report a false claim.

Some critics will argue that this law doesn't do enough to protect consumers and that the FDA should approve dietary supplements just like they do drugs, believing that there is sufficient evidence to suggest that supplements are unsafe and need preapproval. "Those of us in the dietary supplement industry fundamentally believe supplements are safe and now we have a system that will notify us if there is a quality failure, if some ingredient reacts with another food or medication, or if a bad ingredient gets into the system," says Israelsen.



Andrew Weil, MD

Next Steps

Within two years, dietary supplement companies will have to list an address or telephone number on product labels for consumers to report any serious adverse events, and companies will have to promptly turn over these reports to the FDA.

Pointers on Picking Out Poultry

Since the inception of the **organic** label, which prohibits the use of antibiotics and requires animals be given only organic feed, numerous claims have appeared on poultry. In general, I recommend purchasing poultry with the organic seal or from a local supplier who follows similar guidelines. (Visit eatwellguide.org to find organic poultry producers.) Below are some other label terms you might see.

Poultry products injected or marinated with fat, broth, or other flavor enhancers are considered **basted** or **self-basting** and must list these ingredients on labels. Some of these are harmless, while others—like protein obtained from wheat or milk—may interfere with dietary restrictions. For fact sheets on commonly used poultry additives, see fsis.usda.gov.

To prevent foodborne illnesses such as *E. coli*, some manufacturers zap meat with low levels of gamma rays or x-rays. These products have a radura label (the symbol for **radiation**) and seem safe to consume,

although I would opt for organic varieties, which don't permit irradiation.

Additional claims that sound wholesome to shoppers are appearing on poultry, but I find many of these terms misleading and vague. The **certified humane** label suggests that animals were raised in conditions that support natural behavior, appealing to people concerned about animal welfare as well as those looking for tastier meat. **Free-range** is a less comprehensive term and may

indicate the birds have been given access to the outdoors. But the USDA considers opening the chicken coop door for five minutes each day adequate for the free-range distinction. The animal doesn't even have to step outside. And the USDA is working to redefine the word **natural** for poultry. For now, only what's natural about the product from the time it enters the slaughterhouse (like no added colorings or artificial ingredients) must be listed. 

A Trail of Poison. Roxarsone, an arsenic compound commonly used in poultry feed to prevent intestinal parasites in chickens and turkeys, is turning up in food. The Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy recently found arsenic in 55 percent of the raw chicken they purchased from supermarkets and in *all* of the fast-food chicken they tested.

Although producers say arsenic in feed is harmless, evidence suggests it's converted in the chicken to a form thought to cause cancer, diabetes, and cognitive problems in humans. Besides ending up in meat, arsenic in feed almost certainly pollutes the environment through chicken waste.

I hope that the United States follows Europe's lead by prohibiting the use of arsenic in feed. Currently, only poultry that is labeled "organic" is required to be free of this toxic substance.

A Guide to Strength Training by the Decades

Strength training can do for your body what other forms of exercise cannot: It can preserve muscle mass and strength, and in the process, crank up your metabolism. If that's not reason enough to enter a weight room or purchase some dumbbells and ankle weights, then consider this: Lifting weights increases your chances of being healthy throughout life and sidestepping some common problems of aging. Pumping iron regularly not only maintains muscle, but also protects bones and stabilizes joints as you get older. A sturdier frame reduces your odds of osteoporosis, lessens your chances of falling, and makes it easier to lug heavy bags of groceries.

I've been doing various forms of strength training for at least 30 years. I'm not striving for the sculpted physique of Mr. Universe, just healthier muscles. I spend about half an hour, twice a week, working my upper and lower body and core muscles on a resistance machine. But I've also dabbled with free weights and other kinds of equipment. Strength training has the amazing power to reshape your body—its muscle-to-fat ratio—and thereby rev your metabolism at any age. Here's a decade-by-decade explanation of how working with weights truly pays off.

20s to 40s Muscle mass is most easily added early in life, when hormone levels of estrogen and testosterone are high, metabolism is more active, and you might have extra time to exercise. In study after study, strength training has been shown to increase muscle mass and decrease fat, resulting in a healthier body composition. Having more brawn also means you'll burn more calories, a good antidote to a slower metabolism, which experts say slacks off by 1 to 2 percent for every decade past the age of 30.

Adolescence and early adulthood is also the best time to invest in your bone health through diet and physical activity. Bones reach their maximum strength and density sometime between 25 and 30. All the bone you'll have has been deposited by then; now the goal is to hang onto it. Strength training stresses your bones in a way that prevents them from thinning and losing minerals.

As you hit your 40s, you may lose one-third to one-half a pound of muscle each year and gain that much in body fat if you're not active. Replacing age-related fat with muscle should be your aim at this point since muscle is a metabolic furnace. A pound of muscle burns about 35 to 50 calories a day, compared with a measly 2 calories from a pound of blubber. This poses a special challenge for women, who naturally have more body fat and less muscle than men to begin with, and for whom the pregnancy and perimenopause years can be vulnerable times for weight gain.

50s and 60s For both men and women, the loss of muscle fibers starts about age 50 and continues for the remainder of life, says John Faulkner, PhD, a muscle physiologist at the University of Michigan Medical School. "But to some degree, you can decrease the magnitude of that loss in muscle mass by increasing activity, particularly by lifting weights."

Interestingly, he explains, you primarily lose the fast-twitch muscle fibers with age, the kind responsible for quick bursts of power, while the slow-twitch fibers, the ones responsible for endurance, seem to better maintain their capabilities.

In people past 50, the rate of muscle loss may double to one pound per year. Bodies might start feeling flabby partly because more muscle is being replaced by fat and also from less activity. Menopause is a time when women might notice additional belly fat, something physician and author Pamela Peeke, MD, dubs a "menopot." But strength training is the secret to boosting your sluggish metabolism and controlling middle-age spread. And it also helps reduce bone loss, which accelerates in women after menopause, while men might face thinning bones later in life, in their 70s.

70s and Beyond With age, the skeletal muscle fibers are not only fewer in number, but they may also begin to shrink in size, resulting in smaller and weaker muscles. This decreases a muscle's range of motion, bulk, and ability to contract, points out Marilyn Moffat, PhD, a New York-based physical therapist and co-author of the book *Age-Defying Fitness* (Peachtree, 2006). Using your muscles often and placing sufficient demands on them helps counteract these declines, wards off falls, and is vital for maintaining your mobility and independence as you get older.

With training, your muscles can continue to serve you well, even increasing in strength despite advancing in age, says Moffat. Remarkable physical gains have been seen in research done on frail nursing home residents in their late 80s and 90s who participated in resistance-training programs lasting at least eight weeks. Both the size and strength of the participants' muscles significantly improved, as did their walking speed. Some folks even said goodbye to their canes. It just goes to show that you can get stronger at any age.

Training Strategies at Any Age

Keep this advice in mind while strength training to maximize results. If you're a newcomer or need a refresher, get some instruction to develop proper technique or seek out a group conditioning class offered at many gyms.

- **Build up gradually.** New York-based exercise physiologist Jim Wharton urges his clients to strength train in a progressive—not aggressive—fashion. The co-author of *The Whartons' Strength Book* (Three Rivers Press, 1998) has noticed that people often remember where they once left off in lifting weights, then jump back in too quickly and overdo it. He suggests working at the proper intensity for your current level of conditioning, targeting all the major muscle groups at least twice a week.

- **Challenge muscles.** An analysis of studies did not find significant differences in strength gained or muscle mass in people who completed one set of strength-training exercises compared to those doing multiple sets. For an effective single set, do 12 repetitions using a weight heavy enough to fatigue the muscle by your last lift.

• **A working muscle might shake.** As you lift and lower a weight or assume a particular position, your muscle might quiver. This is natural, explains Wharton: "Your body is talking to you." It could mean it's fatigued from doing work it's not used to. Or you might need to rest, modify the movement (like not bending as deep into a squat), or start your routine at a more modest level.

• **Strength train before, after, or in between cardio workouts.** Figure out whether you prefer doing cardiovascular exercise as a warm-up for strength training or the other way around. Research hasn't really found more advantages from doing these workouts in any particular order.

• **All forms of strength training can build muscle.** Familiarize yourself with many forms of strength training—using machines, free weights, resistance bands, or working your own body weight against gravity. Some beginners might like the convenience of sitting during machine workouts, while correct posture and form is critical when using free weights. Resistance bands are perfect for traveling. For a whole-body strengthening exercise, Moffat recommends the plank position (the starting point for a pushup). Hold this pose with

proper alignment for a few seconds or longer over time. Find what you like, even if it combines several approaches.

• **Cardio or flexibility exercises alone are not sufficient to increase muscle.** If you've been sedentary, getting some weight-bearing aerobic activity such as brisk walking can initially increase muscle tone. But muscles eventually adapt to this activity and don't progress. What's key is challenging muscles with increased resistance (or workload against a force) over time. Yoga, tai chi, and Pilates are complementary to strength training, not replacements for it.

• **Recovery is an important part of getting stronger.** Taking at least a day off between strength-training sessions gives muscles a chance to regroup: New muscle fibers can grow while slightly damaged ones rebuild. Mild muscle soreness might follow a workout as you start out or advance your weights and routine. 

Additional resources: Read *Body for Life for Women* by Pamela Peeke, MD (Rodale, 2005), or *Strength Training Past 50* by Wayne Westcott and Thomas Baechle (Human Kinetics, 1998), and visit strongwomen.com.

Help for High-Tech Health Woes

File this under "accidents waiting to happen": In a recent survey, 37 percent of young motorists aged 18 to 27 admitted to typing text messages on cell phones or other hand-held devices while driving. Beyond car crashes, the overuse of high-tech gadgetry can cause other health concerns; below I'll discuss three perils of modern living.

BlackBerry thumb:

Too much time spent emailing, text messaging, and Internet surfing on a BlackBerry or other personal digital assistant (PDA), which users work with their thumbs, can lead to pain, numbness, and tendinitis in these digits and elsewhere in the hand. Thumbs lack the dexterity that fingers have: That's why full-size keyboards let your fingers move quickly in many directions and your thumbs just hit the space bar. The keys of PDAs are tiny, so many users press them hard. Employees who rely on hand-held devices often use them extensively beyond normal working hours. And because many users are middle-aged businesspeople, overuse can aggravate arthritis.

Tips: To thwart thumb problems, give your PDA a rest. Write fewer and shorter messages. Stretch your hands and wrists often. Use a stylus or pen to type. In the office, dock your PDA into a regular-size keyboard and monitor. If you're sore, you can ice the area or take an over-the-counter pain reliever like aspirin or ibuprofen on occasion. If you have tendinitis, experiment with acupuncture; topical application of DMSO (dimethyl sulfoxide), sold in health food stores; or Zyflamend, an herbal anti-inflammatory supplement.

Cell phone elbow:

Constantly holding a cell phone to your ear puts pressure on the ulnar nerve located on the inside of the elbow, causing pain and numbness at this joint or tingling in the ring and pinkie fingers.

Tips: Switch the cell phone from hand to hand, or invest in a hands-free kit. To treat, take 100 mg twice a day of vitamin B-6 (needed for normal nerve function) for six weeks, then phase off it; stop the vitamin if you experience any unusual numbness. Other options include acupuncture and Zyflamend.

iPod ear:

Listening to an iPod music player at too loud a volume for too long a time can strain the eardrums, cause temporary hearing loss or ringing in the ears, and increase the risk of permanent hearing loss. The in-the-ear design of iPod earbuds means you're pumping sound directly to the eardrum. And while the earbuds fit over the outer ear canal, the standard models don't block out background noise, prompting many users to raise the volume louder than they realize.

Tips: Keep the sound at a reasonable level. If the volume is below 50 percent of maximum, you can probably listen for as long as you want, suggests a study presented at a scientific meeting last October. But at 80 percent of the maximum level, listening for more than 90 minutes a day can increase the risk of hearing loss; at full volume, just five minutes can put you at risk. If you often listen in noisy environments, consider buying in-the-ear, noise-attenuating earphones that work like earplugs to passively block out ambient sound, or noise-canceling headphones that can actively capture and remove the background noise. 

Addressing Adult ADHD

Once believed to affect only children, attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) is the second most common psychological problem in adults after depression. An estimated 8 to 10 million US adults have ADHD, although up to 85 percent have not been diagnosed. The distractibility, impulsiveness, and restlessness of the condition impact all aspects of life: People with ADHD may underperform at work, they're at increased risk of substance abuse, they're more likely to have driving accidents, and they have higher rates of divorce.

Perhaps three-quarters of the risk for developing ADHD is genetic. Brain scans suggest people with this disorder have lower levels of dopamine and norepinephrine in the prefrontal cortex, the area of the brain primarily responsible for planning, organizing, and prioritizing tasks. Medications used to treat ADHD can boost levels of these neurotransmitters and reduce symptoms, but I think they're less than ideal. Ironically, stimulant drugs such as Ritalin work by activating inhibitory pathways in the brain that help to filter out distracting information or reduce impulsive or hyperactive behaviors. But stimulants can also suppress appetite, interfere with sleep cycles, and increase blood pressure. A newer drug, Strattera, is not a stimulant, but may be less effective, takes longer to work, and can be sedating.

ADHD, or Just Distracted?

What's the difference between ADHD and the distractibility that's so common in today's fast-paced, 24/7 society? The key is persistence of inattentive, impulsive, and hyperactive behaviors, and whether they're impairing several areas of life. Answer the questions below with never, rarely, sometimes, often, or very often.

How often do you ...

- | | |
|---|-----------|
| 1 Have trouble wrapping up the final details of a project, once the challenging parts have been done? | N R S O V |
| 2 Have difficulty getting things in order when doing a task that requires organization? | N R S O V |
| 3 Have problems remembering appointments or other obligations? | N R S O V |
| 4 Avoid or delay getting started on a task that requires much thought? | N R S O V |
| 5 Fidget or squirm with your hands or feet when you have to sit for a long time? | N R S O V |
| 6 Feel overly active and compelled to do things, like you were driven by a motor? | N R S O V |

If your answers to most of these questions were often or very often, consider getting evaluated by a mental health professional.

5 Natural Approaches Worth Exploring

Counseling can be invaluable, whether it's talking to a psychotherapist or working with an ADHD coach on organization and time management. (Visit adhdcoaches.org to find a coach.) Beyond just shoring up weaknesses, it's important to develop your strengths, stresses Edward Hallowell, MD, a Massachusetts psychiatrist and ADHD expert. "I have seen this, more than any other intervention, transform patients' lives," he says. The following treatments for ADHD may reduce or eliminate the need for medication.

Fish oil supplements. Omega-3 fatty acids, abundant in fish oil, are important components of cell membranes in the brain, and people with ADHD tend to have lower levels of them. Moreover, omega-3s increase dopamine levels, the same neurotransmitter that ADHD medications increase. Dr. Hallowell typically advises adults to take 1 to 2 grams of fish oil daily. Look for a product with both EPA and DHA.

Exercise. Working out is a great way to burn off excess energy and also raises levels of dopamine and norepinephrine, which help people focus. Martial arts such as karate and tai chi can promote self-discipline, increase concentration, and help quiet an overactive mind.

Meditation. Mindfulness meditation, which involves paying attention to your breathing and bodily sensations, helped adults and teens with ADHD in a preliminary study at UCLA. The study involved eight weekly training sessions, plus at-home sitting and walking meditation, and exercises in being mindful while eating or doing other activities. At the end of the study, cognitive tests found that participants got better at staying focused, even when other things were competing for their attention.

Neurofeedback. Also called EEG biofeedback, neurofeedback uses high-tech equipment to help ADHD patients reduce "dreamy" theta brain waves and increase "alert" beta waves. In one study of 62 children and adults with ADHD, neurofeedback improved attentiveness and impulse control as much as stimulant drugs. However, treatment may entail 40 to 60 sessions. (To find a practitioner, visit bcia.org.) A newer technique called the Low Energy Neurofeedback System looks promising, says Dr. Hallowell. It uses weak electromagnetic fields to normalize brain-wave activity and requires only 12 to 15 sessions. (For more, visit ochslabs.com.)

Cerebellar stimulation. Growing evidence suggests the cerebellum, a region at the back of the brain that helps control movement, may also affect attention, impulse control, and planning skills. Several therapies that are beginning to be researched use physical exercises to stimulate the cerebellum and treat certain conditions like ADHD and dyslexia. Dr. Hallowell hopes to study one of them called the DORE Program (doreusa.com), which involves 10 minutes twice a day of exercises like juggling and moving the eyes from side to side. Other approaches that stimulate the cerebellum are Brain Gym (braingym.com) and the Learning Breakthrough Program (learningbreakthrough.com). **SP**

For more on ADHD, see *Delivered from Distraction* by Edward Hallowell, MD, and John Ratey, MD (Ballantine, 2005). For ADHD in kids, see our September 2005 issue.

Ask Dr. Weil Oil of Oregano; The Rice Diet; and More

Does the coconut milk in curry dishes make them unhealthy?

It does. Coconut milk is very high in saturated fat, which drives up LDL (“bad”) cholesterol. Used in Thai, Indian, and other Asian cuisines, coconut milk is the fluid extracted from its flesh. It’s one of the few sources of saturated fat that doesn’t come from animals. Of the two tropical oils, palm and coconut, coconut is worse for you because it has a higher percentage of saturated fat. When dining out, try to avoid curry dishes made with coconut milk, just as you would avoid a meal with a lot of saturated fat.

When making your own curries, you can use light coconut milk to save on calories and saturated fat. One-half cup of regular coconut milk has about 220 calories and 24 grams of fat, while the light version has approximately 70 calories and 6 grams of fat. An even better option is using cashew milk instead of coconut milk. This allows you to skip the saturated fat altogether and replace it with a heart-healthy monounsaturated fat. To make cashew milk, grind a half-cup of the raw nuts in a blender, add 1 to 2 cups of water, and blend on high for a few minutes. The amount of water determines how thick and rich the milk gets.

In the last few years, I’ve lost almost 4 inches in height. Is there anything I can do to slow down shrinking?

Iwould recommend getting a bone-density test, since loss of height is a common effect of osteoporosis. Although you don’t mention your age or gender, changes occurring in bones, muscles, and joints, as well as shrinkage of the spinal disks due to the loss of water, are some common reasons why both men and women tend to become shorter with age. Loss of stature seems to begin between 30 and 40, but it’s usually gradual and not noticeable until your 50s and 60s.

Data from the Baltimore Longitudinal Study of Aging from nearly 2,100 men and women showed that between ages 30 and 70, men lost an average

of 1 ¼ inches in height and women shrank 2 inches. Height loss accelerated after age 80: Men lost 2 inches of height, while octogenarian women lost more than 3 inches. If you fall within these averages, your shorter stature may reflect normal aging. But if height loss is faster, it may be caused by osteoporosis or possibly a metabolic problem like scoliosis or a spinal deficiency. You can slow bone and height loss from osteoporosis by taking bone-building drugs, getting vitamin D and calcium from foods and supplements, exercising, as well as not smoking.

My friend sings the praises of oil of oregano. Is there any basis for this?

Not really. Oil of oregano (this extracted oil is not from the same species as the pizza seasoning) has received a lot of attention, especially on the Internet, as a supposed treatment for health problems ranging from the common cold to wounds to AIDS. During the anthrax scare a few years ago, marketers promoted the oil as a treatment, but without any credible evidence to support the claim. While some laboratory studies suggest the oil has antioxidant, antimicrobial,

antifungal, antiviral, and antispasmodic properties, I haven’t seen any studies in humans showing the remedy offers any great health benefits.

What’s your opinion of the Rice Diet as a weight-loss method?

This stringent eating and fitness plan, developed by a physician in the 1930s, can be a good choice for people hoping to lose a large amount of weight, but it’s not for everyone. Participants stay at the Durham, North Carolina clinic for four to eight weeks, where they follow a low-salt diet and exercise program. Originally, the diet consisted of rice and fruit, hence its name. But now, during the diet’s first phase, which lasts at least two weeks, people consume only various grains and fruits. The second phase adds vegetables and beans plus a weekly serving of fish. Total calories range from 800 to 1,500 a day, depending on the individual and phase of the diet. People can lose up to one pound a day at the clinic, which I don’t recommend without medical supervision.

The pounds don’t come off cheaply: A typical stay at the clinic can cost

continued on next page

MY TAKE ON Sea Buckthorn Berry

First blueberries were all the rage, then pomegranates. Now a sour-tasting orange berry that boasts powerful antioxidant activity is expected to be “the next major health food fad.” The fruit comes from a shrub (*Hippophae rhamnoides*) found on sunny slopes, riverbanks, and seashores from Europe to the Himalayas. Sea buckthorn berry is already popular in Russia, where its oil has been used to treat radiation burns, sunburn, and eczema. It’s also been used in China and India to ease coughs and help digestion, and it’s believed to have immune-boosting and heart-protective properties.

Interest in this berry is growing not only for its therapeutic benefits but also for its nutrient content: It reportedly ranks in the top five plant sources of vitamin C, surpassing oranges, and is rich in vitamin E and omega-3 oils, a rarity among fruits. Its color comes from its abundance of beta-carotene, which it has in greater amounts than pumpkin and apricots. Most people find the fresh berries too tart for eating, but they make tasty juices alone or when combined with apple or grape. Expect to see sea buckthorn berry in a variety of applications from drinks and jellies to sunscreens and cosmetics.

BOTTOM LINE I think this fruit has promising health-promoting effects. I look forward to trying it in its various forms and making it more available. **SP**

upwards of \$7,000. (Reading one of the Rice Diet books is less expensive, but you wouldn't be monitored.) Yet, my main concern is that it may be difficult for people to sustain weight loss once they leave the clinic. Most people are better off losing weight gradually—no more than one to two pounds a week—by eating a more varied diet (like the anti-inflammatory diet in my books) and exercising regularly. You may also be more likely to stick with these habits and keep the pounds off.

Does green tea interfere with the absorption of any drugs?

It might. But it may be the caffeine content of green tea (some 30 mg in a cup—about half the amount in black tea and roughly one-quarter the caffeine in brewed coffee) and the amount of tea drunk daily that cause any possible interaction. Caffeine in tea might increase blood pressure in people taking certain beta-blockers for heart disease or monoamine oxidase (MAO) inhibitors for depression, and it may also reduce the sedative effects

of benzodiazepines used in treating anxiety. Drinking green tea together with lithium may reduce blood levels of this drug for bipolar disorder, and the beverage may cause agitation or tremors when combined with ephedrine. For clozapine to maintain its antipsychotic effects, wait about 40 minutes before sipping green tea.

Since green tea contains some vitamin K, drinking large quantities may possibly make the blood thinner Coumadin (warfarin) less effective. And large amounts of the tannins in green tea may reduce the absorption of some antidiarrheal drugs and bronchodilators for asthma. Even so, I feel the benefits of drinking a few daily cups of antioxidant-rich green tea outweigh potential risks of a drug interaction.

I have laryngopharyngeal reflux disease and am searching for a natural remedy. Might ginger help?

Idoubt ginger would help this condition (also called LPRD), which results when abnormal amounts of stomach acid back up through the

upper sphincter of the esophagus into the back of the throat. Ginger is typically used for nausea and not for acid reflux. It might burn and irritate the laryngeal tissues in your throat.

Unlike people with gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD), those with LPRD often have acid reflux that occurs during the day when the person is upright, more so than when lying down. And they usually don't experience heartburn. The laryngopharyngeal tissue is extremely sensitive to acid backwash and much more vulnerable to damage than esophageal tissue is from GERD. Sore throat, hoarseness, chronic cough, and frequent throat clearing are common symptoms of LPRD. The conventional treatment is a three- to four-month trial of protein pump inhibitor drugs commonly used for GERD, like Prilosec and Prevacid, to block stomach acid secretion.

Since you're interested in natural remedies, I would suggest some of the same lifestyle approaches that I advise for GERD. These include avoiding trigger foods that might activate reflux like spicy or fatty foods, acidic juices, and caffeinated beverages; practicing relaxation techniques daily (stress can increase reflux); and not smoking. You can also try deglycyrrhizinated licorice (DGL), sold at health food stores, to help soothe the laryngopharyngeal lining. Chew two tablets slowly or use a half-teaspoon of powder mixed with water before or between meals. **SP**

Send your health questions or "My Take" topics to Ask Dr. Weil, Self Healing, 42 Pleasant St., Watertown MA 02472.

Good for You!

Monitor the Company You Keep

Listen to your body to help identify which people may enhance or impair your emotional and spiritual well-being, suggests Eve Wood, MD, a psychiatrist and author who teaches at the Program in Integrative Medicine at the University of Arizona.

"Some folks heal us, while others unsettle us. People who are loving, accepting, encouraging, upbeat, and optimistic are most apt to inspire us and nurture our spirits. Those who are critical, negative, and pessimistic are most likely to destabilize us. Pay attention to how you feel in the company of different individuals. Notice when your energy picks up—when you feel excited, at peace, at home, and at ease. Also, note when you become anxious, have a 'less than' feeling, or are overcome by hopelessness. Observe your body language when it somehow tells you *I like that person*, and when it says *Beware* or *I need space*. Your body is always talking to you. It knows where you can thrive and where you'll be held back. Listen to it, and honor its messages."

Source: 10 Steps to Take Charge of Your Emotional Life by Eve Wood, MD (Hay House, 2007)

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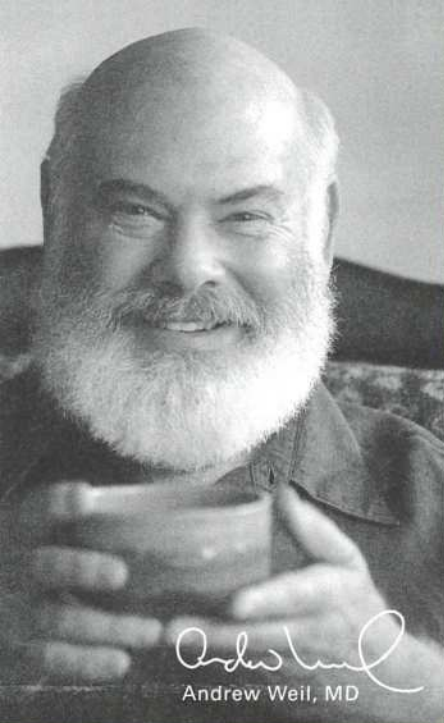
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Tune Up Metabolism

Women & Migraines

Gluten-Free Foods

Fitness Fallacies



Andrew Weil, MD

TIPS

FOR LIVING WELL

■ **Got hay fever?** Starting six weeks before allergy season, take 500 mg of quercetin twice a day between meals to quiet your inflammatory response to pollen. If symptoms act up, use freeze-dried stinging nettle every four hours instead of antihistamines.

■ **Men** who spend more time behind the wheel increase their chances of having skin cancer on their left arm, hand, cheek, and scalp, suggests early research. Wearing sunscreen and closing car windows helps prevent this.

■ **Functional** fitness training conditions your body in ways that mimic everyday movements. It targets muscle groups used in real-life activities. For example, a squat is a functional exercise that makes it easier to garden.

■ **Brown eggs** aren't nutritionally different from white ones; they just come from a different breed of hen. Red or brown-feathered hens lay brown eggs, which are comparable in taste and cooking qualities to white eggs, but are usually larger—a reason they may cost more.

Dr. Andrew Weil's

APRIL 2007

self healing

CREATING OPTIMUM HEALTH FOR YOUR BODY AND SOUL

The Truth Behind Six Fitness Fallacies

Research might change the conventional wisdom about exercise, but misconceptions still linger around locker rooms. For instance, gaining muscular strength was once thought to slow your running speed, an idea that's since fallen by the wayside. And most women now realize they won't develop bulky muscles from lifting weights, since they typically lack enough testosterone to make this happen. Here are six other fitness falsehoods.

FALLACY *Lifting a weight is what stimulates muscle growth.* Lowering a weight, which lengthens a muscle, is just as important as lifting, which contracts it. As former bodybuilder Bill Phillips points out in *Body for Life* (HarperCollins, 2002), lowering a weight is when tiny tears occur; these tears trigger a remodeling process that leads to muscle growth. *Bottom line:* Concentrate on both movements—lifting a weight and letting it down slowly and smoothly.

FALLACY *The amount you sweat reflects your fitness level.* Sweating is only one factor that might indicate if you're fit or out of shape. Besides conditioning, perspiration is also influenced by genetics, gender, temperature and humidity, clothing, and workout intensity. *Bottom line:* As you become fitter, you actually sweat sooner, which cools you down faster.

FALLACY *Panting and sweating is necessary for a good workout.* To benefit your heart, you should be breathing harder than normal, but not gasping for air. This might work up a sweat, but whether you're dripping wet or not is less important. *Bottom line:* Aim for a "talking pace," an intensity that allows you to have a conversation without breathing too hard.

FALLACY *Stretching reduces injury risk and muscle soreness.* Stretching before a workout doesn't cut injury risk and may delay pain only temporarily. And evidence is mixed on its benefits afterward to prevent injury or put off pain. Some research

has found that overall fitness is a more important factor than stretching in avoiding injury. *Bottom line:* Regular stretching does improve flexibility, which increases a joint's range of motion. Stretch after exercising, when muscles are warm and less apt to strain. Hold each stretch for 30 seconds to lengthen the muscle.

FALLACY *If you exercise, you need a lot of extra protein.* People who work out regularly need only a little more protein than couch potatoes to rebuild muscle tissue, and it's easy to get this from food. I'd favor vegetable protein, including beans, soy, and nuts, while eating fewer animal sources such as eggs, dairy, and meats, but don't give up fish. *Bottom line:* Active people don't need protein powders, and there's no benefit from getting more than 20 to 30 percent of your daily calories from protein.

FALLACY *Exercise helps you sleep better.* Research suggests that physical activity has only modest effects in good sleepers, perhaps extending shut-eye by 10 minutes in those who do an aerobic workout for less than an hour. But physical activity might help those with sleep difficulties: The mood boost and sunlight exposure that insomniacs get from exercising outdoors seem to encourage slumber, and any workout might naturally help shift circadian rhythms, the body's 24-hour cycle. *Bottom line:* Experiment to see if exercise influences your sleep.

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HEALTH IN THE NEWS

A Restful Route to a Healthier Heart

A catnap after lunch is not only refreshing, it can also work wonders for the heart. In a six-year study of more than 23,000 Greek men and women with no history of heart disease, those who took roughly a half-hour siesta at least three times a week were 37 percent less likely to die from heart disease compared to adults who never napped. Working men who regularly dozed in the afternoon enjoyed the most benefits, suggesting that napping perhaps protects the heart from stress. (*Archives of Internal Medicine*, February 12, 2007)

Comment ► If it works into your schedule, there are several health reasons to grab a quick snooze during the day (provided you don't have insomnia). I recommend napping as part of my Healthy Aging program.

Air Pollution Leads to Heart Risks in Women

Where a woman lives and the air she breathes may affect her risk of cardiovascular disease, according to an analysis of 66,000 older women's medical records in 36 metropolitan areas. Researchers found a strong link between air pollution levels and the percentage of women who had either succumbed to or survived cardiovascular events over a six-year period. Whenever the concentration of fine particulate air pollution, typically from power plants and exhaust fumes, increased by 10 micrograms per cubic meter of air, a woman's risk of dying from heart disease rose by 76 percent and risk of cardiovascular problems increased by 24 percent. (*New England Journal of Medicine*, February 1, 2007)

Comment ► This is the first large study to show that air pollution in specific communities is directly associated with cardiovascular disease in women.

Eating Fish During Pregnancy Boosts Kids' Brainpower

Children of mothers who ate more seafood during pregnancy may have higher IQ scores and better developmental skills than youngsters of women who ate less fish. A study of more than 8,000 British women who consumed at least 12 ounces of seafood weekly during pregnancy concluded that fish was a significant benefit to the children's neurodevelopment in their first eight years and had no negative effects on them. When scientists looked at the mother's intake of omega-3 fatty acids from all foods (not just fish) during pregnancy, they found similar developmental benefits in children. (*The Lancet*, February 17, 2007)

Comment ► Getting enough omega-3s during pregnancy is important, but choose seafood carefully. I recommend wild Alaskan salmon (especially sockeye), instead of more toxic farmed varieties, and contaminant-free fish oil supplements.

Predicting Women's Cardiovascular Risk

A new model for estimating heart disease and stroke risk in women may help better identify those who need to improve their odds. Doctors have long relied on five factors to assess risk: age, blood pressure, smoking, total cholesterol, and HDL cholesterol levels. But recently, researchers analyzed data on more than 24,000 women over a 10-year period and found that adding two new risk factors—having a parent who had a heart attack before age 60 and high levels of C-reactive protein (CRP), a measure of inflammation—improved the ability to predict women's heart problems. (*Journal of the American Medical Association*, February 14, 2007)

Comment ► The new model can be found online at reynoldsriskscore.org. I usually recommend hs-CRP testing to determine heart risk, and these findings make me even more likely to suggest it for women with other known risk factors.

Health Impacts of a Hotter Planet

April 22 is Earth Day, so it seems fitting to consider the possible health effects of global warming. The unusually mild winter in some parts of this country brought an earlier return of pollen and mold spores, causing some hay fever sufferers to start sneezing months sooner than usual. And with summer heat waves becoming more intense, that means higher ozone levels, which are associated with higher death rates from heart and lung ailments. Plus, ticks, mosquitoes, and other insects that carry disease—like Lyme disease, West Nile virus, Rocky Mountain spotted fever, and Eastern equine encephalitis—are spreading to areas once thought too cold for them to survive.

Climate change is a worldwide phenomenon that may place even greater strains on developing nations already lacking adequate medical resources. As temperatures soar, malaria-bearing mosquitoes are moving into higher altitudes and latitudes in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. Coastal flooding due to rising seas or stronger hurricanes may trigger outbreaks of water-borne diseases. Other regions may experience more-frequent droughts. (For more, visit chge.med.harvard.edu.)

My colleague Rubin Naiman, PhD, a psychologist and sleep expert at the University of Arizona's Program in Integrative Medicine, sees global warming as an inflammatory disorder of the planet. Satellite images of the Earth at night show it becoming more lit up, as cities and suburbs burn ever brighter. The planet can't cool down at night, says Naiman, and humans aren't cooling off either: Like a fire within, chronic inflammation in the body may be the root cause of serious chronic disease like heart disease and cancer.



Andrew Weil, MD

Fast Forward

Some health effects of climate change once projected to occur in 2080 are happening already, says Paul Epstein, MD, of Harvard's Center for Health and the Global Environment.

Dr. Weil's Guide to Eco-Friendly Gardening

With spring's arrival, a garden holds the promise of fresh, homegrown produce and a connection to the earth. This link to the land is at the root of eco-friendly gardening, which focuses on renewal, recycling, and regeneration by mimicking patterns observed in nature. Here's my six-step plan for a "green" vegetable garden that you can enjoy from seed to table.

1 Create great soil. Strong and healthy plants start from soil that's enriched with a good home compost made from three parts brown material, such as dead leaves, and one part green, such as vegetable peels. Pile it on and turn about once a week, says my gardener, Jace Mortensen. In a few months, you'll have a rich compost to mix with your soil. In the meantime, you can buy organic compost at your garden center. If your soil needs additional nutrients, mix in organic fertilizers or spread some dried seaweed. (I avoid blood meal and bone meal due to concerns about mad-cow disease.) Mortensen refers

to soil as your garden's refrigerator; well-stocked soil provides a balance of nutrients. Visit nrcs.usda.gov to learn more about improving soil in your region of the country.

2 Practice companion planting. Certain plants, when grown together, can complement one another and keep pests away. I always plant basil next to tomatoes to help them overcome insects and disease, as well as improve their growth and flavor. Onions planted around cabbage keep rabbits away, while chives boost the flavor of carrots. The book *Carrots Love Tomatoes* (Storey Publishing, 1998) offers hundreds of other helpful plant combinations.

3 Mulch. Keep your garden beds hydrated and weed-free by spreading yard waste, such as pine needles and shredded bark, on top of them. You can also use a coconut husk mulch, which provides soil with minerals as the husks decompose.

4 Invite friends. Attract birds with baths and feeders and encourage toads with damp shady spots.

A toad can eat more than 50 grubs, grasshoppers, and cutworms a night.

5 Discourage foes. Talk to local gardeners and pick plants well suited for your region, including those that are universally unappealing to bugs, such as onions, mint, and basil. If you notice bugs, spray leaves with a weak mixture of liquid soap and water, says Mortensen, who uses another homemade spray of cayenne pepper and water to keep larger critters like deer and rabbits at bay. I also occasionally use nontoxic biological controls sold at garden centers, such as *Bacillus thuringiensis* (BT), neem, and pyrethrums, to control insects.

6 Rotate to renew. Rotate vegetables annually and avoid reintroducing a plant to the same soil until at least three years have passed, suggests Mortensen, since diseases can survive in soil from year to year and each plant species affects soil differently. The cabbage family, for example, needs rich soil and pulls nitrogen out of it, while beans replenish this essential element. 

10 Natural Ways to Tune Up Your Metabolism

Some people are naturally blessed with a faster metabolism, allowing them to eat a lot yet stay slim. Others may blame a slow metabolism for excess pounds, but I suspect that poor eating and exercise habits are more frequently the culprits. Metabolism is the process by which your body obtains energy from nutrients in food. Up to 75 percent of the calories you burn daily sustain basic functions like breathing, heart rate, waste removal, plus cell growth and repair. Physical activity accounts for another 15 to 25 percent of calories used, while digestion and absorption of food uses about 10 percent.

Metabolism tends to slow with age, but many lifestyle factors under your control can keep it well tuned, helping you manage your weight and sustain energy levels. The idea is to “change your body from a fat-storing to a fat-burning mode,” says James Nicolai, MD, medical director of the Franciscan Center for Integrative Health in Indianapolis. He agrees with the idea that your ability to burn calories depends on the number and efficiency of your mitochondria—the tiny engines that produce energy in every cell—as discussed in *UltraMetabolism* by Mark Hyman, MD (Scribner, 2006). Here’s my 10-point program describing what you can do to keep your metabolism running smoothly:

Lift weights. Every pound of muscle in your body burns about 35 to 50 calories a day, while a pound of fat burns just 2 calories. Muscle mass tends to decline with age, unless you do strength training to preserve it. Strength training helps increase the number of mitochondria in your body and keep metabolism revved up. A 2002 study found that it boosts metabolism and fat burning for a full two days after a workout. Gradually build up to 30 minutes of strength training two or three times a week. (For more, see the March issue.)

Do interval training. Studies show that alternating short bursts of intense physical activity with longer periods of lighter exercise can increase metabolism. In one trial, active

adults did four to seven 30-second bursts of “all out” cycling followed by a few minutes of recovery time, three times a week for two weeks. Participants doubled their endurance in exercise tests and increased mitochondrial activity by 38 percent, meaning their muscles could use more oxygen and burn more calories. Dr. Hyman suggests exercising at 80 to 90 percent of your maximum heart rate for one minute and then slowing to 50 percent of maximum heart rate for three minutes; alternate for 30 minutes, two or three times a week.

Eat small, frequent meals. In one study of obese women, eating small, regular, frequent meals (about six a day) led to a faster metabolism compared to following an irregular eating pattern (*American Journal of Clinical Nutrition*, January 2005). Eating at regular intervals encourages a steady caloric burn. But if you go more than three or four hours without eating, your metabolism slows down to conserve energy.

Include protein at every meal. A study of normal-weight women found that consuming 30 percent of daily calories as lean protein—including beans, soy foods, nonfat dairy products, fish, skinless poultry, and lean meat—increased metabolism *while participants slept*. Plus, the women said they felt fuller and more satisfied than when they consumed only 10 percent of calories as protein (*American Journal of Clinical Nutrition*, January 2006). Protein is harder for the body to break down than foods containing fat or carbohydrates, so you burn more calories when digesting it.

Choose low-glycemic-load carbs. Researchers followed overweight or obese adults assigned to one of two low-calorie eating plans (1,500 calories daily) for 6 to 10 weeks: a low-fat diet or one emphasizing foods with a low glycemic load (GL), a measure of how much blood glucose rises after a meal. Low-GL foods include whole grains, sweet potatoes, fresh fruits, and legumes, while higher-GL foods include products made from flour, white potatoes, and dried fruits. People in both groups lost about 10 percent of their body weight, but the low-GL group maintained a higher metabolism, burning 80 more calories a day, and felt less hungry (*Journal of the American Medical Association*, November 24, 2004). A low-GL diet doesn’t cause spikes in insulin levels that encourage fat storage. If you have kidney problems, consult your doctor before increasing your protein intake.

Spice up your meals. A recent review concluded that certain spices may help people manage weight by speeding up metabolism (*Physiology and Behavior*, August 30, 2006). Capsaicin, the compound that gives chili peppers their fire, has been shown in several studies to boost heat generation by the body, which means people burn more calories after a meal. Black pepper and ginger appear to have similar effects. Capsaicin may also suppress appetite: In one study, men who got an appetizer with hot sauce ate 200 fewer calories at lunch and in a later snack than men who did not.

Drink green tea. Japanese research suggests antioxidant compounds found in green tea called catechins may aid in weight loss by stimulating the body to burn calories and decreasing body fat. Men who drank a bottle of oolong tea fortified with a green tea extract containing 690 mg of

Burn Calories by the Can?

While I suggest sipping green tea as one way to raise metabolism, I’m not enthusiastic about a new carbonated green tea beverage called Enviga that claims to burn calories. The drink, which has five calories per 12-ounce can, has green tea extracts containing the catechin EGCG, plus caffeine (stimulants tend to raise metabolism) and artificial sweeteners including aspartame. The manufacturer claims that by drinking three Envigas a day, healthy, normal-weight adults aged 18 to 35 burned 60 to 100 extra calories. Yet, whether the beverage would have the same effect in heavier people isn’t known, and it had the opposite effect in 20 percent of study participants—they burned *fewer* calories. At \$1.29 to \$1.49 a can, consuming three Envigas a day would cost at least \$116 a month.

catechins (equivalent to about six cups of green tea) every day for three months lost more weight and had greater reductions in waist size and body fat than men who drank a bottle of oolong tea that did not contain it (*American Journal of Clinical Nutrition*, January 2005). I suggest drinking a few cups of good-quality green tea every day.

Relax. When you're stressed, your body produces more cortisol, a hormone that can slow metabolism, stimulate appetite, and increase abdominal fat. Practicing daily relaxation methods may promote fat burning. One study found that regular yoga practice, which doesn't burn significant amounts of calories, can help prevent middle-age spread in normal-weight men and women and promote weight loss in those who are overweight (*Alternative Therapies in Health and Medicine*, July/August 2005).

Get enough sleep. A lack of shut-eye can affect hormones that regulate appetite, leading to weight gain. In one study, people who slept five hours or less a night weighed more than those who got eight hours of sleep and had higher levels of ghrelin, a hormone that stimulates hunger, and lower levels of leptin, a hormone that suppresses appetite (*Public Library of Science Medicine*, December 7, 2004).

Consider supplements. Certain supplements may promote a healthy metabolism by protecting the mitochondria or increasing their energy production, such as Coenzyme Q10, acetyl-L-carnitine (ALC), and alpha-lipoic acid (ALA). Suggested daily doses are 30 to 100 mg of CoQ10, 500 mg of ALC twice a day, and 200 mg of ALA twice a day. It's fine to take all of these, and both ALC and ALA are in the Weil Juvenon supplement. 

Five Things to Know about Gluten-Free Foods

Enjoying pizza and beer has never been easier for men and women with celiac disease, who can't tolerate foods containing gluten, a protein in wheat, barley, rye, and hybrids of these grains. In January, Anheuser-Busch introduced a gluten-free beer called Redbridge that replaces barley with the cereal grass sorghum (guinea millet). Many people with celiac disease miss beer, admits Cynthia Kupper, a dietitian and executive director of the Gluten Intolerance Group of North America, who has the disease. Read on to see why more companies are developing gluten-free (GF) products.

The audience is broadening.

People with celiac disease, an autoimmune disorder that damages the small intestine when the diet contains gluten, aren't the only ones buying GF products. Some children with autism follow a gluten- and casein-free diet, while others with chronic pain, migraines, multiple sclerosis, and chronic fatigue have gone gluten-free. Still more people choose to avoid wheat in their diet. While true wheat allergies are extremely rare, wheat sensitivity is more common, affecting perhaps 15 to 20 percent of the general population, says allergist Randy Horwitz, MD, PhD, medical director of the Program in Integrative Medicine. Many of his patients think their symptoms—headaches, poor digestion, chronic congestion,

arthritic pain—are linked to wheat or gluten intolerances.

The market is growing. Both the consumer and medical communities are more aware of gluten and wheat sensitivity, explains Wendy Kohatsu, MD, an integrative physician at Oregon Health & Sciences University in Portland, who adds that dietary sensitivities have long been underdiagnosed or even denied by Western medicine. Celiac disease is a case in point: Previously considered rare, it's now thought to affect 3 million Americans (most undiagnosed), 10 times more than earlier estimates. One possible cause of the increase is that many strains of wheat now in cultivation have been bred for higher gluten content.

The gluten-sensitive community has been demanding tastier food. Several creative chefs met this need with innovative cookbooks, and that caused the food industry to notice this growing specialty market.

Sales are booming. Once constituting a tiny section at health food stores, GF products are now also sold at mainstream markets. The category saw an 86 percent jump in new products in 2006 and was a \$700 million industry. That figure is expected to reach \$1.7 billion in four years. Convenience foods are big sellers, including heat-and-serve items, pizzas, and frozen entrees. The sales of breads made from exotic grains like quinoa

and amaranth are also on the rise, as are baked goods and snacks.

Shopping is challenging. Fresh produce, fish, meat, poultry, and legumes are gluten-free. And most dairy lacks gluten, except for a few yogurts and cheeses. Kupper reads labels very carefully on condiments and canned goods, and avoids cereal, pasta, and baked goods unless the store has a natural foods section. Frozen food is tricky because highly processed products are likely to contain gluten. It may turn up in soy sauce, hydrolyzed vegetable protein, malt, modified food starch, and other thickeners.

Allowed GF carbs can include hot cereals made from buckwheat or teff (an Ethiopian grain), rice flour or flax crackers, rice or corn pastas, and waffles made with potato starch, to name a few. Although improving in taste and nutrition, a good loaf of GF bread is somewhat hard to find. Gluten gives bread dough its elasticity. According to Kupper, "The flours used to make gluten-free breads often give them a less appealing texture than the real thing."

Expect clearer labeling. The FDA has proposed new federal requirements for gluten-free labeling to take effect by the summer of 2008. Some manufacturers now voluntarily label their products, but the terms used might be inconsistent. For more on GF living, visit celiac.com, celiac.org, gluten.net, and livingwithout.com. 

Women and Migraines

Nearly one in five women have migraines, and about half of those who seek treatment say their headaches are associated with their menstrual periods. Migraines were long believed to be caused by inflammation and dilation of blood vessels, yet new theories suggest many stem from neurochemical events that slow down brain cell function and diminish blood flow in the head. This new thinking helps to explain the link between migraines and fluctuations in estrogen levels: Changing estrogen levels may affect neurotransmitter activity in the brain.

Keeping a symptom diary that tracks potential migraine triggers, such as dehydration, fatigue, weather, food, medications, and menstruation, can help you pinpoint controllable ones and aid in selecting treatments. It may also raise awareness of links to serious health conditions that can complicate migraine treatment. A recent study of 1,032 women found that those with at least 15 migraines a month were four times more likely to report symptoms of major depression, such as low energy and joint pain, than those with fewer headaches (*Neurology*, January 9, 2007). Women with migraines that begin with an aura should also watch their cardiovascular health. A study last year found a strong link between migraines and heart disease (*Journal of the American Medical Association*, July 19, 2006). And growing evidence suggests many sinus headaches are really migraines.

There isn't one migraine treatment that works for everyone, so trial and error may be necessary. I suggest women try the natural approaches below before turning to prescription drugs, which may have dangerous side effects. It can take several months to notice an effect from these strategies, and a combination of treatments may be necessary.

Lifestyle changes. Eliminate foods containing possible migraine triggers such as chocolate, other caffeine sources, processed meats, aged cheese, sour cream, and red wine, and reduce inflammation by exercising daily and eating an anti-inflammatory diet. Maintaining a regular schedule can also help. "Something as minor as sleeping in on the weekends or changing the time of your coffee break can trigger

Can Estrogen Help?

Hormonal migraines can occur a few days before menstruation or during ovulation. In some women, taking birth control pills can reduce the frequency and intensity of attacks, while in others the sugar pills at the end of the cycle can trigger a migraine as estrogen dips. Switching to continuous birth control pills may help, says Dr. Bernstein, but you have to consider that oral contraceptives can raise the risk of a blood clot, heart attack, and stroke. Women with menopausal migraines who are considering hormone replacement therapy should first talk with their doctor to weigh its benefits and risks.

a migraine," says Carolyn Bernstein, MD, director of the Women's Headache Center at the Massachusetts-based Cambridge Health Alliance and author of the upcoming book *The Migraine Brain* (Free Press, 2008). Plus, notice how you first react to a migraine. One of Dr. Bernstein's patients found she was holding her breath every time a migraine hit, making it worse.

Mind-body techniques. Stress is a common trigger for migraines, so I advise practicing relaxation techniques. Biofeedback can also help by teaching you to divert excess blood flow away from the head. (To find a biofeedback practitioner, visit bcia.org.) Research shows that regular massage or acupuncture treatments may also reduce the frequency of attacks and breath work may help during a migraine. Dr. Bernstein suggests visiting a Brennan Healing Science practitioner to balance the body's flow of life energy, or *qi*. "Energy out of alignment can make pain worse," she says. Other energy therapies include Reiki and Therapeutic Touch.

Herbal supplements. Instead of using nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs, such as ibuprofen, to manage pain, try the anti-inflammatory herbal formula Zyflamend from New Chapter, suggests Randy Horwitz, MD, PhD, medical director of the Program in Integrative Medicine. To help prevent migraines, try butterbur. One study found that taking 75 mg of butterbur twice daily for four months reduced migraine frequency by nearly 50 percent, possibly by reducing inflammation and blood vessel spasms. Only use products that are free of toxic pyrrolizidine alkaloids (PAs); one reliable brand is Petadolex. If these remedies don't provide relief, you can experiment with feverfew, which may reduce migraines by hindering the release of substances that dilate blood vessels. Take 100 to 150 mg daily of capsules standardized to contain at least 0.2 percent parthenolides.

Magnesium. Studies show some benefits from supplementing with this mineral, which can boost serotonin levels, a neurotransmitter that's deficient in migraine sufferers. Take 200 mg twice daily with calcium (up to 800 mg a day) to counter any laxative effect of magnesium. Avoid magnesium oxide, which is not well absorbed.

Riboflavin. This nutrient, also known as vitamin B-2, may work by increasing energy production in brain cells. It's estimated that one out of every two to three patients treated with riboflavin will experience fewer attacks, but a high dose of 400 mg daily is needed to achieve this effect.

Coenzyme Q10. Although not as well studied as riboflavin, CoQ10 may also work by boosting cell energy. In a study of 42 migraine sufferers, researchers found that 50 percent of those taking 100 mg of CoQ10 three times daily experienced a reduction in headache frequency and nausea after three months, compared to only 14 percent of those who took a placebo (*Neurology*, February 22, 2005). Dr. Horwitz recommends taking the same dose used in the study. Avoid CoQ10 if you're on prescription blood-thinning drugs.

Melatonin. A Brazilian study found that taking 3 mg of melatonin 30 minutes before bedtime for three months cut migraine frequency by at least 50 percent in most participants (*Neurology*, August 24, 2004). Although the mechanism is unclear, melatonin may help migraines by regulating sleep cycles and blood pressure. **SP**

Ask Dr. Weil Fish Oil Allergies; Boosting Immunity; and More

I'm allergic to fish oil supplements. Is there something else I can take with the same benefits?

You can take Neuromins DHA supplements, derived from algae grown outside the ocean, to get the benefits of omega-3 fatty acids while avoiding fish. Take 400 to 600 mg a day. I hope an algae-derived source of EPA—fish oil's other fatty acid—will soon be available. Until then, you'll have to rely on dietary sources of alpha-linolenic acid (ALA), a precursor fatty acid. Try eating a handful or two of walnuts per day, or switch to eggs that are fortified with omega-3s.

Flaxseed is also a good source of this fatty acid. Buy whole organic flax seeds, grind them in a blender or coffee grinder, and add 1 tablespoon of the nutty-tasting flax meal to cereal, salad, or potatoes each day.

The only vegetable with omega-3s is purslane, a chewy and nutritious plant that's often dismissed as an invasive weed in the United States but is an important part of the heart-healthy Mediterranean diet. Specialty seed catalogues carry purslane seed, and you can grow it yourself. It's also found in some bagged salad mixes.

I've been diagnosed with lumbar stenosis. Walking aggravates my problem. What exercises can I do to improve my condition?

Swimming and therapeutic yoga are good options. With lumbar stenosis, a narrowing of the spinal canal puts pressure on the spinal cord, causing lower back and leg pain. Some people are born this way, while others develop problems after midlife, a result of "wear and tear" from everyday activities. Although rest and lying down can improve symptoms, too much inactivity can weaken back muscles and leave you feeling stiff and achy.

Walking can aggravate lumbar stenosis by making the spinal canal even smaller. Swimming and other forms of water exercise put less stress on the back than many exercises. Also, riding an exercise bike in a bent-forward

position can open up the spinal canal and ease pressure on nerves.

Yoga, in general, has been shown to be helpful for chronic low back pain, and a therapeutic yoga instructor can guide you through stretches and postures you're most apt to find comfortable. Choose an instructor who has experience treating your condition. (To find a therapeutic yoga instructor, visit iyat.org.) Another option is Viniyoga, a gentle form of yoga that focuses on your unique needs. (To locate an instructor, visit viniyoga.com.)

I have a relative who has essential tremors. What do you recommend?

Many people find they can control this condition through lifestyle changes. The trembling and shaking of essential tremor (ET) most frequently affect the hands, although tremor can also occur in the head, arms, and even the larynx. Unlike Parkinson's disease, ET does not lead to serious complications and only occurs during voluntary movements, not when the body is at rest. Conventional physicians may treat it with medications like beta blockers

and anti-seizure drugs, but these drugs only work about half the time and have undesirable side effects.

Since stress can worsen tremors, I recommend relaxation techniques of all kinds. Aromatherapy can have some soothing effects, especially lavender, which has been shown to calm motor activity and slow the central nervous system. Instead of medications, I advise taking fish oil supplements, at a dose of 1 to 2 grams a day, to promote nervous system health. The omega-6 fatty acid GLA, found in evening primrose oil, may also help tremors by keeping the myelin sheaths that cover nerves healthy. Take 500 mg of evening primrose oil twice a day. It's fine to take both fish oil and evening primrose oil.

Strengthening the hands by using 1- or 2-pound wrist weights may help relieve tremors there, while acupuncture seems beneficial for shakiness of the head and upper extremities. People with ET should also avoid caffeine and alcohol; while alcohol can offer temporary relief, ET may worsen over time as you develop a tolerance to it. For more, visit essentialtremor.org.

Ask Dr. Weil continued on next page

MY TAKE ON Herbal Oil Concerns

Lavender oil (*Lavandula angustifolia*) and tea tree oil (*Melaleuca alternifolia*) are common ingredients in personal care products, so I'm not surprised that people are concerned about a recent study that suggests use of these oils in certain products may temporarily promote breast growth in a few young boys (*New England Journal of Medicine*, February 1, 2007). The study reported on the condition, known as gynecomastia, in three boys aged 4 to 10 who used lavender-scented soaps and skin lotions, or shampoos and styling products containing tea tree and lavender oils, on a regular basis. The effect faded when the boys stopped using these products, prompting researchers to test the oils against human cells in the lab.

Results suggest the two oils appear to boost estrogen, a female hormone that stimulates breast tissue growth, and block the male hormone androgen. Although some natural ingredients can have estrogen-like properties, researchers did not pinpoint any specific estrogen compound in the lavender or tea tree oil in the lab and the three boys had normal hormonal levels when diagnosed with gynecomastia.

BOTTOM LINE Both lavender and tea tree oils have a long history of safe use and the number of boys affected is extremely small, so it's hard to draw any conclusion from this study. I think it's okay to use these oils, but would be cautious about overexposing children; daily use may be too much. 

I take Zylamend for joint pain, but it causes burning in my stomach and belching. Can I reduce these effects?

To reduce possible GI symptoms, I suggest taking this herbal anti-inflammatory formula on a full stomach, such as after a meal. If you do this and your symptoms persist, take DGL (deglycyrrhizinated licorice) 15 minutes before meals. DGL increases the mucous coating of the stomach and protects it from irritation. A standard dose of DGL is two chewable tablets or one teaspoon of the powder form. By the way, it's likely the ginger in Zylamend that's causing the burning sensation in your stomach.

How can I build up my immune system while on chemotherapy?

Supplements can help strengthen immunity during chemotherapy, without interfering with the therapy's effectiveness. I often recommend the Chinese herb astragalus, known to protect immunity and increase the production of infection-fighting white blood

cells; take one standardized capsule twice a day. A mixture of Asian mushrooms can also be useful. Host Defense from New Chapter (new-chapter.com) and the Weil Immune Support formula are combination mushroom products with a range of species; follow package directions. And practitioners of traditional Chinese medicine sometimes use Chemo-Support, an herbal formula that includes astragalus and reishi mushroom, to increase immunity and reduce the toxicity of many conventional cancer treatments.

The herb milk thistle protects the liver and kidneys from toxic injury, so it's useful for people taking any chemotherapy agents that can affect these organs. Look for capsules standardized to 70 to 80 percent silymarin. A typical dose is 350 mg twice a day.

Also, eating a wholesome diet that includes plenty of fruits and veggies may fortify immune function. Limit saturated fats and avoid trans fats, both of which appear to reduce white cell production and impair the activity of T-cells needed for protection against infection. Research has also found

that moderate exercise three or more times a week restores the immune cell counts of women who are undergoing breast cancer treatment back to normal levels, and also boosts women's mood and energy levels. Of course, take everyday precautions like avoiding contact with sick people and washing your hands regularly.

Have you heard about green-light laser therapy for enlarged prostates?

I'm not familiar with this newer laser technique, but urologist Aaron E. Katz, MD, director of the Center for Holistic Urology at Columbia University Medical Center, tells me that it's minimally invasive and a good option for treating severe cases of benign prostatic hyperplasia (BPH) that would otherwise require surgery. The therapy uses a patented green-light laser that's been shown to have a more effective wavelength than other lasers for removing excess prostate tissue. A laser fiber is passed through the urethra to deliver green-light energy that selectively vaporizes the tissue. It seems to be just as effective at relieving urinary symptoms as the more common surgery, called transurethral resection of the prostate or TURP, which uses a cutting instrument to remove part of the gland. Yet, the laser therapy appears to cause less bleeding and requires a shorter hospital stay.

For milder cases of BPH, I recommend using the herb saw palmetto. Take 160 mg of a standardized extract twice a day alone or combined with other herbs, such as stinging nettle root (*Urtica dioica*). And eat whole soy foods such as tofu, tempeh, and soy milk. Avoid prostatic irritants such as alcohol, caffeine, and tobacco. 

Send your health questions or "My Take" topics to Ask Dr. Weil, Self Healing, 42 Pleasant St., Watertown MA 02472.

Good for You!

Inhale Beauty, Exhale Surrender

Unwind with these relaxing breathing exercises—which can be done separately or together—from California-based movement instructor Mary Bond, who says healthy breathing releases hidden tensions in the body that can distort posture.

Inhaling Beauty: While lying down, remind yourself of an aroma that gives you pleasure. Inhaling through your nose, imagine that you are smelling roses or fresh-baked cookies. Let the scent flow in along with feelings of receptivity and gratitude. If you find it difficult to imagine an aroma, picture a beautiful scene instead and take in the beauty with each breath.

Exhaling Surrender: As you breathe out through your nose, turn your attention to the weight of your body on the floor. During each exhalation, choose body parts to sense—ankles, hips, or elbows, for example. Discover which part rests most easily into the floor. Savor that sensation and let the feeling spread to parts of your body that seem less weighted. With each breath, surrender to gravity.

Source: *The New Rules of Posture* by Mary Bond (Healing Arts Press, 2007)

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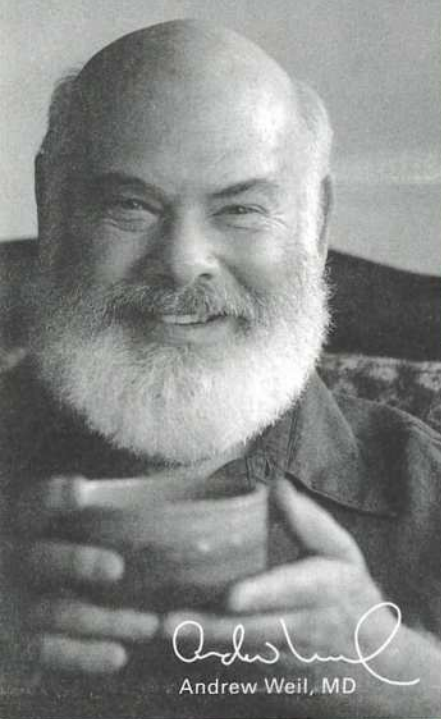
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Building Resilience

Food Contaminants

Centering Yourself

The Benefits of Folate



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MAY 2007

self healing

CREATING OPTIMUM HEALTH FOR YOUR BODY AND SOUL

TIPS

FOR LIVING WELL

■ Go on a **kindness** spree when you have a bad day, suggests spiritual teacher Eknath Easwaran. Even if it seems like an act at first, spread kind words, warm smiles, and selfless deeds, and see what happens.

■ A **mother's** food choices and fitness habits strongly impact her daughter's diet, health, and odds of being overweight.

■ Some **hay fever** sufferers are more sensitive to perfumes, cold air, and cleaning products than those without seasonal allergies, says new research. Hay fever sufferers over 35 also tend to be more irritated by tobacco smoke.

■ The **flexibility** of the spine is viewed as a measure of aging or youthfulness by many yogis. A supple spine in an older person is linked with youth. A younger person who's stiff is seen as old.

■ Let your tap run for **twenty** seconds before drinking or cooking with water. Polluted water can result from sitting still in the pipes, where toxic chemicals from the metal can seep in.

Powerful Tools for Building Resilience

You probably know a highly resilient person—the cancer patient who appreciates that the illness revealed his inner strength and gratitude or the employee who was laid off from her job and immediately rebounded to start a successful company. In fact, the odds are you probably know many individuals with the ability to adapt well to change and deal with the inevitable curve balls life throws us. Scientists once thought that resilience was exceptional, but studies have found it's quite common and not necessarily a result of contending with traumatic experiences or being born with the right genes. Instead, it involves thoughts and behaviors that can be learned and developed by anyone.

Research has proved that the nervous system remains plastic throughout one's life, enabling it to change with experience. It's also been shown that highly resilient people have more activity in specific parts of the brain. By measuring brain activity, researchers have discovered that doing certain actions over time, such as meditation or problem solving, can permanently boost activity in these areas. Scientists have also documented the benefits of resilient traits. In one study that looked at US students a few months after the September 11 terrorist attacks, researchers found that those who were emotionally positive before the attacks felt more love and gratitude afterward than sadness, anxiety, and fear (*Journal of Personality & Social Psychology*, February 2003).

Below, I'll discuss some other characteristics of highly resilient people and offer tips for cultivating these qualities, so that the next time life hands you lemons you don't have to try to make lemonade. You can say: "OK. This has happened to me. Now how can I move through the situation and learn something from it?"

► **Cultivate elasticity.** Become a human Slinky by developing a strong inner self that is rooted, but also flexible enough to

bounce back from adversity. **Action:** Practice mindfulness to find what Buddhists call your inner witness, an aspect of consciousness in all of us that neutrally listens, watches, and reflects. Techniques to center your mind (see page 4) can nurture the witness so insights emerge. Al Siebert, PhD, author of *The Resiliency Advantage* (Berrett-Koehler, 2005), also suggests keeping a list of your strengths and compliments you receive and setting moderately challenging goals to improve your self-confidence and self-esteem, two other important elements of a strong inner self.

► **Use your smarts.** Resilience has been linked to higher intelligence, but you need not be a genius. Research suggests that it may not be so much your IQ that matters as what makes up IQ, says W. John Curtis, PhD, a psychology professor and resilience researcher at the University of Rochester: "Part of the success on an IQ test is not being stressed out during it and handling emotions to focus on one specific task." **Action:** In addition to using relaxation techniques, which I recommend to everyone, people should also practice memory and concentration techniques, facets of intelligence associated with resilience that help keep the mind flexible and active.

► **Flex your positive side.** When you're having fun, stress levels are reduced and your cognitive skills are expanded. Scientific evidence also suggests those positive

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HEALTH IN THE NEWS

Do Antioxidant Supplements Increase Mortality?

Rather than preventing disease, some common antioxidant supplements might increase the risk of death, according to a controversial meta-analysis of 68 studies including more than 232,000 adults. Taking vitamin E increased mortality risk by 4 percent; beta-carotene, 7 percent; and vitamin A, 16 percent. However, the authors note they did not know the exact cause of death of any of the study participants. No increased risk of death was linked with taking vitamin C or selenium. (*Journal of the American Medical Association*, February 28, 2007)

Comment ▶ This is shoddy research that should have never been given such prominence by the journal or mass media. Antioxidants are essential nutrients, and there's a large body of evidence suggesting they provide numerous health benefits. I agree with experts who say the studies included in this meta-analysis were impossible to compare due to vastly different study populations and numerous designs that involved a wide range of dosages, nutrients, and time frames. Furthermore, the majority of trials in the analysis tested antioxidants to treat people with certain diseases, not as preventives. And it was not until the researchers divided the studies into "high risk bias" and "low risk bias" categories, based on their own criteria, that they were able to link antioxidants with mortality. I still recommend healthy individuals take a daily multivitamin that includes proper forms and amounts of antioxidants. (My multivitamin recommendations appeared in the May 2006 issue, currently online at drweilselfhealing.com.)

Tai Chi Proves a Smart Move Against Shingles

An ancient Chinese martial art not only improves balance in older adults, it may also beef up immunity. In a study of 112 healthy adults aged 59 to 86, half of whom did 40 minutes of tai chi three times a week for four months and then received a shingles vaccine, their immune response some two months later was nearly twice as strong as that of a group who also got the shot but only attended health education classes. Scientists suspect this specific form of moving meditation might also strengthen the effectiveness of vaccines for influenza or other conditions. (*Journal of the American Geriatrics Society*, April 2007)

Comment ▶ I'm amazed; I would have never thought tai chi could have this potent effect on immunity. I had a bout of shingles last summer, and it was so uncomfortable that I advise people 60 and older to get the preventive shingles vaccine, which was first approved last May. It is extremely effective in reducing the impact of this disease caused by the herpes zoster virus, which also causes chickenpox.

Keep Moving to Protect Your Memory

Regular aerobic exercise boosts brainpower by building new cells, according to a recent study. Researchers used brain imaging technology to follow blood flow and cell growth in the brains of mice while exercising and afterward. They discovered an increase in brain cells in a region linked to normal age-related memory decline, indicating physical activity may slow memory loss. Scientists then looked at the brains of 11 people during and after exercise and found the same blood flow pattern, suggesting humans, like mice, benefit physically and mentally from a good workout. (*Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, March 27, 2007)

Comment ▶ Previous research had shown that people who exercise do better on memory tests and that some brain cells are renewable, but this is the first study to directly link the two findings to a specific part of the brain—one more good reason to get your heart rate up and keep moving as you age.

Does Biased Research Affect What You Eat?

In the largest analysis to link industry bias and nutrition research, scientists reviewed more than 100 studies on soft drinks, juice, and milk. They found that research sponsored by manufacturers or groups with a commercial interest was four to eight times more likely to be favorable than research that wasn't industry-funded (*PLoS Medicine*, January 2007). This doesn't mean studies are inherently flawed if the sponsors have a financial interest, but it suggests bias that I believe can have a costly influence on public health. Findings from nutrition research receive frequent media attention and are used to influence dietary guidelines and regulate health claims on foods and beverages.

Bias in chemical, drug, and tobacco studies has been well-documented, and it's become clear that industry influence is not limited to a poorly designed study or misinterpreted data, says my colleague Paul Abramson, MD, a residential Fellow at the Program in Integrative Medicine. "Bias is already present when an industry chooses what to fund, and it's often hidden in attempts to suppress data, bury negative findings, and withhold financial ties between authors and industry."

Unlike 20 years ago, when studies were mostly financed by the government or organizations with no commercial ties, industry-funded research now represents the bulk of published health studies in the United States. To retain consumer confidence, those involved in all fields of scientific research, including integrative medicine, need to improve how they fund, oversee, and publish studies. And consumers need to look at industry-funded studies skeptically, seek additional research, and avoid drawing conclusions from isolated news reports.


Andrew Weil, MD

Case in Point

A 2003 review of studies on the popular fat substitute olestra concluded that authors of positive studies were much more likely to have financial ties to the manufacturer than authors of negative or neutral research results.

Powerful Tools for Building Resilience continued from page 1

emotions, like happiness and satisfaction, not only slow down heart rate and lower stress hormones after a bad experience, but set the stage for creative and innovative solutions to problems that may arise from that experience (*Journal of Personality*, December 2004). **Action:** The key to emotional equilibrium is balancing pessimism and optimism. If you're only optimistic, you're setting yourself up to fail from shock when faced with a challenge. If you're too pessimistic, you may be leading yourself to a negative outcome. Siebert suggests using short-term pessimism to anticipate difficulties and then focus on long-term optimism. And look for the humor in situations; laughter really is the best medicine.

► **Use your imagination.** Imagining nurtures creativity, yet another characteristic of many highly resilient people. Imagining how a situation is going to turn out is different from analyzing it, says Beth Miller, PhD, a Jungian therapist and author of *The Woman's Book of Resilience*

(Conari Press, 2005). "When you're imagining, you are inviting intuition in and are able to name your body sensations, feelings, emotions, and images." Harnessing your imagination opens your mind up to new solutions or opportunities. **Action:** Take time to reflect on a situation and try to envision your thoughts and some potential outcomes.

► **Build strong social ties.** People who cope well with adversity tend to either have strong relationships or know when to reach out for help. They're also often eager to help others and are generous with their time, attention, or guidance. **Action:** Cultivate healthy and solid relationships and seek out help when needed. You can also tap into these connections when building resilience: Ask people for suggestions about how to attain your short- and long-term goals and for assistance with discovering your personal strengths and skills.

► **Ask questions.** Most resilient people are skilled problem solvers, who may use their brain much more

efficiently than those who aren't (*Development and Psychopathology*, March 2003). **Action:** Make an action plan to tackle problems. When faced with a problem, start by first stepping away from the situation and making a list of questions to ask yourself. Here are some suggested questions from *The Resiliency Advantage*:

- What is happening?
- How serious is this?
- How much time do I have?
- Must I do anything?
- How are others reacting?

► **Avoid a victim mentality.** People often feel they are the victim in a situation and toss aside any self-blame. By taking responsibility for your role, you can embrace the situation and act. **Action:** "The key to making your life better is to stop blaming others for triggering reactions in you that you don't like," explains Siebert. "The problem isn't what others do, it's your reaction to what they do." 

Take a quiz at resiliencycenter.com to see how resilient you are.

Stress Less: A Guide to Centering Your Mind and Body

When you're feeling pushed and pulled by stresses large or small, what makes you feel centered, in balance, or grounded? How do you find what T.S. Eliot called "the still point in the turning world"? For me, simply focusing on my breathing is wonderfully relaxing and calming. I also love swimming: I feel buoyant and free in the water and my rhythmic breathing produces an altered state of consciousness that I enjoy. And I find watching running water, whether a waterfall or a desk fountain, to be a simple, useful form of meditation.

Self Healing recently asked 10 mind-body experts about their favorite techniques for centering themselves. Try them out and see what works best for you.

“Most often I find myself paying attention mindfully to either breath, sounds, or bodily sensations as a way of ‘centering’ in the present moment. The key, of course, is to be mindful—to pay attention without trying to change anything, but by welcoming the experience as it unfolds. If your mind wanders, it’s *not* a mistake. Rather, meet any movement of attention with patience and kindness, and refocus on the breath, sounds, or sensations. I use this practice countless times throughout my waking hours.”

—**Jeffrey Brantley, MD**, director of the Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction Program at the Duke Center for Integrative Medicine and author of the forthcoming *Five Good Minutes at Work* (New Harbinger, 2007)

“Three things stand out. First is gratitude. I try to be grateful for both the blessings and challenges that life brings. I like this Lakota prayer: *Creator, whether the path is easy or difficult, I will fear not.* The next thing is nature. I tend to wake early and greet the rising sun, and in the evening I’ll stand under the stars. And the third thing is I’ll practice some form of exercise every morning. I’ll do about 10 minutes of standing meditation (the most widely practiced form of qigong) as well as a round of tai chi. The idea is to become so familiar with this psychological and physical state of tranquility that you can drop back into it whenever you need to.”

—**Kenneth Cohen**, a Colorado qigong master, scholar of indigenous medicine, and author of *The Way of Qigong* (Ballantine, 1999) and *Honoring the Medicine* (Ballantine, 2006)

“There are three things I use. One is mindful power walking. When I’m stressed, I’ll walk by myself at a fast pace for an hour. I’ll spend some of the time trying to process what I’m upset about and some of the time focusing on my breath, the cadence of my feet, or my surroundings. Another thing I’ll do is mini-relaxations or ‘minis.’ I’ll simply shift from shallow chest breathing to deep abdominal breathing and take several breaths. The third thing is literally stopping what I’m doing and asking myself, *What do I need?* Women often have so many things on their to-do lists that everything ends up taking on the same urgency. This technique lets you stop and consider all your choices.”

—**Alice Domar, PhD**, a Harvard psychologist who is also executive director of the Domar Center for Complementary Healthcare in Waltham, Massachusetts

“I do some simple things: I listen to music while working, do a lot of deep breathing, and try to take moments of gratitude during the day, like when I notice something lovely. I also enjoy doing walking meditation. And I listen to guided imagery. One imagery exercise I find soothing is actually something I developed for healing trauma: You enter your own broken heart, seen as a dismal and rubble-strewn landscape. As you journey into the deepest part of your heart, you emerge into a place of stunning beauty, which symbolizes the part of you that’s untouched and undiminished by whatever you’ve been going through.”

—**Belleruth Naparstek**, a Cleveland psychotherapist, author, and creator of the Health Journeys guided imagery audio series (healthjourneys.com)

“I’ll do a daily 20- to 30-minute mindfulness meditation, during which I’ll visualize my mind as a tranquil pool of water. As thoughts and feelings arise, I’ll imagine them as bubbles that rise to the surface, burst, and send out ripples before the pool becomes calm again. Also, whenever I’m feeling anxious or angry, I’ll recall family members—now long gone—who made me feel especially loved or safe. And before going to bed, I’ll try to think of three good things that happened during the day. Doing a similar mental exercise has been shown in studies to increase overall happiness.”

—**Richard O’Connor, PhD**, a practicing psychotherapist in Connecticut and New York and author of *Undoing Perpetual Stress* (Berkley Books, 2006)

“One of the first things I do each morning is a seven- to 10-minute yoga routine. I do the Sun Salutation interspersed with pushups when I’m in the plank pose. As a heart surgeon, I’m standing all the time, often at awkward angles, and I find this routine helps prevent back strain. I also use the early morning to deal with nagging unfinished tasks (or NUTs), like the broken screen door that smacks you in the butt every time you use it. These are often very simple to fix, but if you never get around to them, NUTs create a subtle underlying angst that can undermine your health.”

—**Mehmet Oz, MD**, a professor of cardiac surgery at Columbia University, frequent guest on *Oprah*, and author, most recently, of *YOU: On a Diet* (Free Press, 2006)

“I’ve used this imagery for many years. After letting my breathing deepen, I’ll imagine I’m firmly connected to the earth through the soles of my feet and also connected to the sun in a sort of energetic column. So there’s a vertical channel of energy that runs from the sun through me to the earth. I’ll also imagine that I’m forming a circle with the people I love and that my heart is connected to their hearts through a horizontal channel of energy. The horizontal and vertical channels meet in my heart. When I’m feeling anxious, this practice lets me feel inspired by the source of life above, supported by the earth below, and connected to those whom I love.”

—**Martin Rossman, MD**, a California physician who is also author of *Guided Imagery for Self-Healing* (HJ Kramer, 2000) and founder of The Healing Mind (thehealingmind.org)

“This is less a ‘technique’ than a way of entering the present moment with intention and attention. I stop or slow down inwardly, by becoming aware of my breath, by sensing the condition of the body and the quality of the mind. Then, I’ll turn my attention toward the situation before me (inwardly and outwardly), and ask myself internally: *What is called for now?* I’ll listen closely for the reflexive response, and act or wait depending on the answer. Sometimes I’ll stop and ask this question many times in the course of a day.”

—**Saki Santorelli, EdD**, executive director of the Center for Mindfulness in Medicine, Health Care, and Society at the University of Massachusetts Medical School

“My favorite technique for relaxation, centering, and balance is the yogic breathing technique *ujjayi*, which means ‘to become victorious’ or ‘to gain mastery’ in Sanskrit. You breathe softly and evenly while constricting the throat or glottis muscle to restrict the airflow and make a whispering sound. If you whisper the word *Sirrrr* and elongate the *rrrrr*, that’s the *ujjayi* sound on exhalation. You can start to learn the technique by making this sound while breathing

through the mouth. Then make the same sound while breathing only through the nostrils. You can do this practice for a few breaths or up to several minutes.”

—**Ganga White**, director of the White Lotus Foundation yoga retreat in Santa Barbara, California, and author of *Yoga Beyond Belief* (North Atlantic Books, 2007)

“My favorite centering technique is to sing a prayer phrase or a favorite line from a song repetitively in my head. I’ll do it out loud if alone. I use this technique when stressed, in anticipation of speaking before a large crowd, and when I have to remain in the company of people who unsettle my nervous system. I also use it when the fancy strikes me. In addition, I exercise aerobically at least four days a week. This is meditative and centering for me. I use an elliptical trainer or hike the desert hills of Tucson. I make a point to exercise when I’m on the road, too. I may run if I’m someplace without a fitness center.”

—**Eve Wood, MD**, a psychiatrist at the Program in Integrative Medicine and author of *10 Steps to Take Charge of Your Emotional Life* (Hay House, 2007) **SP**

The Wide-Ranging Benefits of Folic Acid

You may know folic acid (or folate) as the B vitamin needed by mothers-to-be, since deficiency in the earliest stages of pregnancy—before most women know they are expecting—can cause severe birth defects like spina bifida. But this nutrient, which is found in beans, leafy greens, and orange juice, regulates many metabolic reactions and offers other valuable health benefits for men and women. I’ll recap the latest findings on folic acid from both food and supplements.

Cognition in seniors. Two recent studies suggest folic acid can sharpen the aging mind. One trial looked at 818 people aged 50 to 70 with high homocysteine levels. Since folic acid reduces homocysteine levels, the participants apparently consumed little of the nutrient. People who took 800 mcg of folic acid daily for three years scored higher on cognitive function tests than those who received just a placebo (*The Lancet*, January 20, 2007).

In addition, an epidemiological study of 1,459 people aged 60 and older revealed a strong relationship between high serum folate and good cognitive function among those who

also had normal vitamin B-12 levels. However, people with high folate and low B-12 levels were at *increased* risk of anemia and cognitive impairment (*American Journal of Clinical Nutrition*, January 2007). So I recommend taking a B-12 supplement if you take folate (B-complex supplements and most multivitamins contain both).

Alzheimer’s disease. One recent population-based study that followed 965 people aged 65 and older for six years found that those with a higher intake of folate from a combination of food and supplements were less likely to develop Alzheimer’s disease than those with a low intake. However, neither dietary folate nor supplements alone were found to reduce the risk of Alzheimer’s; only the two sources in combination appeared to have the protective benefit (*Archives of Neurology*, January 2007).

Age-related hearing loss. In one trial of 728 people aged 50 to 70 with high serum homocysteine, those who took 800 mcg of folic acid a day for three years had less low-frequency hearing loss than those given a placebo. No slowing of high-frequency hearing loss was discovered (*Annals of Internal Medicine*, January 2, 2007).

Cancer. Researchers who tracked nearly 82,000 people for an average of about seven years reported those who ate plenty of folate-rich foods were less likely to develop pancreatic cancer, although folic acid supplements didn’t offer the same benefit (*Journal of the National Cancer Institute*, March 15, 2006). A recent pilot study of 43 people with precancerous lesions of the larynx found that taking very high doses of folic acid (15 mg a day) helped to prevent the lesions from becoming cancerous (*Cancer*, July 15, 2006). And a meta-analysis of published studies suggests high folate intake from diet or supplements may help protect against breast cancer among women who have one or more alcoholic drinks a day (*Journal of the National Cancer Institute*, January 3, 2007).

Getting enough. It’s best to get folic acid from food and supplements, because different forms of it may be absorbed and used differently by the body. I advise everyone to take a multivitamin or B-complex supplement containing at least 400 mcg of folic acid (the RDA for most adults) in addition to eating leafy greens and beans on a regular basis. **SP**

Fear at the Kitchen Table

A successive string of highly publicized outbreaks of foodborne illness—from *E. coli* on fresh spinach to salmonella in peanut butter to reports of tainted pet food—has amplified awareness of food safety and raised questions about the food supply's vulnerability to either accidental or deliberate contamination. Of concern is the scope and frequency of illness as well as the types of food affected. Last fall's spinach scare marked the twentieth time this leafy green or lettuce triggered an illness or outbreak since 1995. Salmonella in peanut butter was a first in this country.

Animal-based foods may have made fewer headlines, but they're not off the hook. In January, *Consumer Reports* analyzed 525 fresh broiler chickens from 23 states. After testing conventional, organic, and antibiotic-free birds, they found that 83 percent of the chickens harbored salmonella or campylobacter bacteria, up from 49 percent three years earlier. Both organisms can cause GI problems; however, proper handling and thorough cooking of chicken usually kills them.

Although the majority of reported food poisonings are isolated cases, I believe the centralization and industrialization of the food supply are making outbreaks more likely.

Three Perspectives on Food Safety

1 Federal Agencies. The US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) says their surveillance data for 2004 and 2005 show no rise in overall food outbreaks. Yet, many foodborne illnesses never get reported to public officials. The CDC relies on computer-based tools, like PulseNet, to track and control outbreaks. "This relatively new technology allows us to identify whether the exact bacterial strain in one state matches that in another through DNA fingerprints of the foodborne pathogens," explains CDC spokesperson Lola Russell. "We can find clusters quickly this way and locate the source of the problem."

Better monitoring uncovers trouble sooner, yet some consumer groups find fault with the piecemeal system of federal oversight. Some 15 different agencies regulate food safety. More-frequent outbreaks have bolstered those groups asking Congress to overhaul the system by creating one food-safety agency with increased authority.

One group recommending broad-based transformation is the nonpartisan Government Accountability Office (GAO). For the first time, the GAO designated food safety as a high-risk area this January. Citing the patchwork nature of the federal system, the GAO said the inconsistent oversight, ineffective coordination, and inefficient use of resources have called into question whether the government can more efficiently and effectively protect the nation's food supply.

The primary food-safety agencies are the USDA, which oversees meat, poultry, and processed egg products, and the FDA, which is responsible for the remaining 80 percent of foods including seafood, produce, and dairy (yet receives only 38 percent of food-safety funding). Further complicating matters are some quirky distinctions in agency oversight. For example, the FDA inspects a manufacturer that produces

a frozen cheese pizza approximately once every five years, but if there's pepperoni on that pie, the facility gets daily USDA inspections. Soups made with more than 2 percent meat fall under the FDA's watch; soups with less are the USDA's responsibility. Beef broth manufacturers receive FDA attention, while chicken broth makers get USDA visits.

And agency power is limited. Neither the USDA nor the FDA can recall contaminated foods. They can only request that manufacturers voluntarily remove them from shelves.

2 Food Producers. Less and less food production is being done locally at small farms or manufacturing plants and more is occurring at huge centralized facilities and "industrial" farms. The spinach outbreak was traced back to one large-scale farm and one central processing facility that can quickly wash, dry, bag, and ship greens from coast to coast.

To stem problems, the FDA issued new, voluntary guidelines in March for fresh-cut produce, asking industry to monitor weak spots in the production cycle where contamination may occur. But these efforts came months after California growers created their own mandatory standards.

"The guidelines are a good thing, but not revolutionary. Reputable companies have been following similar protocols for years," explains Will Daniels, vice president of quality, food safety, and organic integrity for Natural Selection Foods, whose fields were implicated in the spinach scare. Suggesting that private industry can work more quickly than federal legislation, his company has begun even more rigorous testing of raw products and finished goods, and re-envisioned their food-safety program, modeling it after the beef industry's efforts in the 1990s following a fatal *E. coli* outbreak in undercooked fast-food hamburgers.

3 Consumers. Five types of food—seafood, poultry, beef, eggs, and produce—accounted for 59 percent of all food-related outbreaks between 1990 and 2004. Twenty-one percent of these cases were linked with fruits and vegetables, perhaps because they grow close to the ground, where their surfaces may come in contact with unclean tools or workers' hands, contaminated water, or animal waste.

Yet, any fresh, raw food can pose some risk whether it's produce or meat, says Shelley Feist, executive director of the Partnership for Food Safety Education (visit fightbac.org for food-safety advice). But, she says, some of the risk with produce involves the form: "Rather than eating whole carrots in their natural skins, consumers are buying a lot of ready-to-eat products that are peeled and cut, and this introduces more risk." Young children, the elderly, pregnant women, and those with compromised immune systems are most at risk.

Consumers react to food outbreaks with confusion and trepidation, suggests a Rutgers University study of more than 1,000 Americans done two months after the spinach incident. Researchers found misunderstanding of the kinds of spinach recalled, and uncertainty about when the recall had ended or whether washing tainted spinach would make it safe (it wouldn't). Nearly one-fifth of those surveyed stopped buying not only bagged spinach but other forms of bagged produce, too. Media efforts quickly spread word of the recall, but consumer confidence takes time to win back. 

My doctor suggests taking niacin to improve my cholesterol levels, but I get an extreme flush reaction. Does "flush-free" niacin work as well?

No, "flush-free" forms of niacin are ineffective for treating cholesterol problems because they're metabolized via a different chemical pathway than regular niacin. Also known as nicotinic acid or vitamin B-3, niacin can lower LDL ("bad") cholesterol somewhat and is particularly good at raising HDL ("good") cholesterol. But as you have already learned, niacin can cause an intense flushing effect that lasts up to 45 minutes. In most cases, flushing goes away within a week to 10 days of starting niacin therapy.

But if you want to help your body develop a tolerance to flushing, you can start with 50 mg of niacin daily and slowly work up to a higher dose (typically between 1.5 and 3 grams a day) by adding 50 mg a week. You can also minimize flushing by taking an 81-mg aspirin 30 minutes before niacin, and by taking niacin with food (avoid hot beverages, alcohol, and all spicy food, which can intensify flushing). Because niacin at dosages sufficient to affect cholesterol levels also carries the risk of liver toxicity, it's important that you take it only under the supervision of your doctor, who should test your liver function periodically.

An alternative to over-the-counter niacin is a prescription-only extended-release form called Niaspan that seems to be as effective and may be less likely to cause flushing. This medication is also more expensive.

I'm confused about what cocoa to buy. Is natural cocoa alkalized?

I prefer the more intense flavor of natural cocoa to Dutch-processed varieties. Natural cocoa (also called unsweetened) is not treated with alkali, while "Dutched" or "Dutch-style" is. Alkali treatment makes cocoa powder darker in color and milder in flavor, and may result in different leavening reactions in baked goods. (Most recipes containing baking powder, which has

a neutral pH, call for Dutch cocoa, and those with baking soda, which is alkaline, typically use natural cocoa.) If a recipe just says "cocoa," use the natural kind. The label might not say it's natural; it may just say "cocoa." But Dutch-processed varieties will be so identified.

Once opened, cocoa has a shelf life of one year; if sealed, it can hold indefinitely. Store cocoa in a cool, dry place away from herbs and spices, since it can easily pick up other flavors.

You often recommend tofu, but I read that feeding it regularly to children can cause hormonal problems. Is this true?

I think the opposite is true: Tofu and other soy foods are among the best protective agents against hormonally driven tumors like breast and prostate cancers. While some studies in animals have linked genistein—one of soy's isoflavone compounds—to an early onset of puberty, other studies in humans haven't revealed similar problems. A study of Taiwanese children found consuming up to 40 mg of isoflavones (the amount in about 2 cups

of soy milk) a day from food led to no adverse effects on hormonal development. Last year, a US government panel determined that there was not enough scientific evidence to conclude soy formula or foods cause developmental harm in infants or children.

I think it's worthwhile for children and adults to enjoy one or two servings of whole soy foods a day. A serving is 1 cup of soy milk or 1/2 cup of tofu, tempeh, or green soybeans (known as sweet beans or edamame). But I don't recommend any fractionated soy foods (those made with soy isolate, for example), functional foods spiked with soy derivatives, or soy supplements, which I find often contain higher amounts of isoflavones than the whole soy foods listed above and whose long-term safety remains unknown.

What are some natural treatments for Lou Gehrig's disease?

While there is no known cure for this neurodegenerative disease, known as amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS), certain supplements may be

Ask Dr. Weil continued on next page

MY TAKE ON Glyconutrients

Can sugars be good for you? Proponents of glyconutrient supplements claim the natural plant sugars in these products improve communication between cells, which supports immune function. They also allege that people are often deficient in these sugars, due to the low amount of good-quality fruits and vegetables in their diet, and that taking supplements containing them (one example is Ambrotose from Mannatech) can treat a host of health problems. A recent review article, sponsored by Mannatech and written by two physicians who have served as paid company consultants, says glyconutrients have been tested for everything from asthma, attention deficit disorder, and autoimmune diseases to cancer and AIDS. Yet, the article also reveals that there's been only one placebo-controlled trial of glyconutrients, which found little benefit for asthmatic children. In addition, the authors acknowledge that much of the research on these supplements has been "inconclusive and preliminary" (*Explore*, November/December 2006).

BOTTOM LINE Skip these pricey supplements, which typically cost more than \$1 a day. There is no reliable scientific evidence that people are deficient in glyconutrients—which the human body can make from other nutrients normally found in the diet—or that supplementing with them can improve any medical condition. What's more, I'm always wary of any product, such as Ambrotose, sold through multi-level marketing. 

helpful as adjuncts to medication and other conventional treatments. ALS attacks the nerve cells in the brain and spinal cord responsible for voluntary muscle movement. To date, Rilutek is the only approved drug for ALS shown to slow the disease's progression and prolong survival. Doctors may also prescribe specific medications to relieve muscle cramps and other symptoms, or recommend a type of physical, occupational, or speech therapy.

I also suggest experimenting with lion's mane (*Hericium erinaceus*), a mushroom used in traditional Chinese medicine. It contains compounds called erinacines that can stimulate the growth of nerve cells. Lion's mane is sold as liquid extracts or capsules; follow the package directions. In addition, I recommend a daily antioxidant regimen (vitamins C and E, selenium, and mixed carotenoids) to help neutralize free radicals, a possible factor in the disease. A study of more than 950,000 healthy adults found that those who took vitamin E supplements regularly had a lower-than-average risk of dying of ALS in a 10-year period, suggesting

the nutrient may help prevent the disease and prolong life in people with it (*Annals of Neurology*, January 2005).

Why do peeled baby carrots develop a white film or become slimy? Does this make them inedible?

Known as white blush within the industry, a film might form on baby carrots because of dehydration. This coating of dry, white cells appears on the carrot's surface. It's harmless and shouldn't affect the taste and nutritional value, but most consumers find it unappealing, an indication of a lack of freshness. The rate at which white blush forms can be influenced by both the humidity levels and temperatures at which the carrots were stored and their growing conditions before processing. (Carrots from poorly irrigated fields tend to form white blush more rapidly.) Some manufacturers are now treating baby carrots with a "harmless" coating during processing to prevent white blush from forming.

Interestingly, the manufacturers' attempts at warding off white blush

may be encouraging sliminess instead. Processors keep baby carrots extremely moist during packaging to avoid the white film. But the high-moisture/low-oxygen conditions inside the plastic bag might cause "slime," or lactic acid bacteria, to thrive. Although generally not harmful and easily washed off, the clear slime is a turnoff to consumers. To help prevent this slippery film, take carrots out of the bag they come in and place them in ventilated vegetable bags or reusable cotton produce bags. Also, make sure the crisper in your refrigerator is kept below 40° F.

Does saw palmetto affect the results of a PSA test? Should men discontinue taking it prior to getting tested?

As a precautionary measure, I recommend not taking the herb saw palmetto in the two weeks before the prostate-specific antigen (PSA) test, which helps screen for prostate cancer. Although this herbal remedy, which has been shown in studies to be effective for benign prostatic enlargement, hasn't been found to affect PSA levels, there are theoretical concerns it could be by influencing certain hormones.

Saw palmetto treats enlarged prostates by reducing the concentration of dihydrotestosterone (DHT), a metabolic byproduct of testosterone. This herb has also been found to lower levels of another hormone, called epidermal growth factor (EGF). High levels of both EGF and DHT may play a role in prostate cancer, and by influencing these hormones, saw palmetto could potentially affect PSA levels. For this reason, many doctors may recommend that their patients get a PSA test before starting saw palmetto treatment, and I agree with this advice. **SP**

Send your health questions or "My Take" topics to Ask Dr. Weil, Self Healing, 42 Pleasant St., Watertown MA 02472.

Good for You!

Practice Hunger Tolerance

Dieters often fear hunger and may eat to avoid experiencing it, says psychologist Judith Beck, PhD, whose new book on losing weight draws on techniques from cognitive therapy. The hunger experiment below helps people learn how to withstand hunger and recognize that this sensation comes and goes. You'll realize that just because you want to eat doesn't always mean you should. This is an important lesson to learn about losing weight and keeping it off.

- Choose a day and purposely skip lunch. ■ Using a discomfort scale where 0 means no discomfort at all and 10 is the most extreme discomfort you've ever felt, assign other ratings to past situations when you felt uncomfortable (like a root canal or job interview). ■ Every hour between your normal lunchtime and dinner, rate how strong your discomfort is on that scale. ■ Also, reflect on how the previous hour went, and record how high or low your discomfort ranged. Remind yourself of times when you've been hungry but survived.

Source: The Beck Diet Solution: Train Your Brain to Think Like a Thin Person by Judith S. Beck, PhD (Oxmoor House, 2007)

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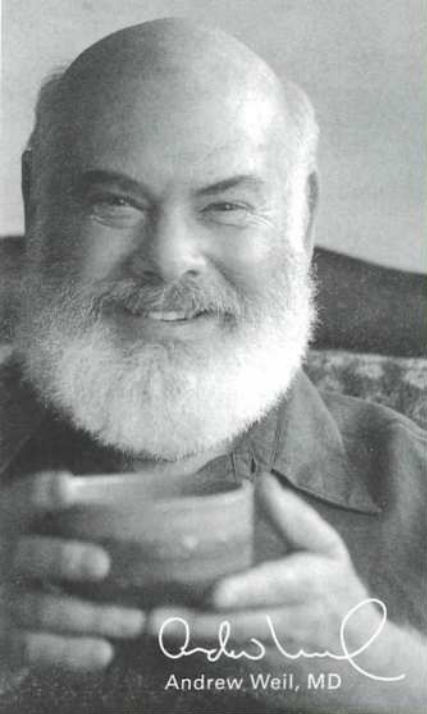
next issue

How to Boost HDL

The Best Nut Butters

Top Natural Remedies

Tame Food Cravings



Andrew Weil, MD

Dr. Andrew Weil's

JUNE 2007

self healing

CREATING OPTIMUM HEALTH FOR YOUR BODY AND SOUL

Five Natural Strategies to Boost HDL

Low HDL ("good") cholesterol is now considered as important a risk factor for cardiovascular disease as high LDL ("bad") cholesterol. And you can never have too much of the good stuff. Not only does HDL slow the build-up of plaque by removing LDL from artery walls, but it also acts as an antioxidant. So, pay attention to the HDL results on your cholesterol test and focus on your lifestyle to improve them. The risk of heart disease increases in men when levels fall below 40 mg/dL and may be greater in women when values drop under 50 mg/dL.

Although research on HDL-boosting drugs looks promising, don't wait to act. The latest drugs tested were found to raise blood pressure and have no effect on the arterial plaque (one actually increased the rate of death). Besides, I've found that small lifestyle changes offer a significant benefit for most people. It's estimated that for every 1 mg/dL increase in HDL, the risk of heart disease drops by two percent for men and three percent for women.

1 Maintain a healthy weight. Shedding 6 pounds may increase HDL levels by approximately 1 mg/dL.

2 Elevate your heart rate. In a 2003 study, people who went through an eight-month training program consisting of two strength training sessions and two aerobic training sessions per week had a 5 mg/dL increase in HDL. Regular physical activity is key: When participants stopped exercising, the benefit went away. "I recommend 40 minutes to one hour of aerobic exercise every day and strength training and weight-bearing exercises three times a week," says cardiologist Mimi Guarneri, MD, medical director of the Scripps Center for Integrative Medicine in La Jolla, California.

3 Upgrade your diet. Avoid simple carbohydrates—such as white rice, white bread, and cookies—that tend to be high on the glycemic index and get converted

into triglycerides. "HDL and triglycerides have a teeter-totter relationship; when triglycerides are high, HDL plummets," says cardiologist Stephen Devries, MD, author of *What Your Doctor May Not Tell You About Cholesterol* (Warner Wellness, 2007).

Also rid your diet of trans fats, which lower HDL, and add more monounsaturated fats and omega-3 fatty acids. Good food choices include many of the foods in my anti-inflammatory diet, such as olive oil, wild sockeye salmon, green leafy vegetables, walnuts, ground flaxseed, and avocados. Dr. Guarneri also suggests fish oil supplements. Take 1,000 to 2,000 mg of fish oil a day in divided doses with meals.

4 Attend to your vices. Smoking lowers HDL by an average of 5 mg/dL, while one or two alcoholic drinks a day may raise HDL by an average of 4 mg/dL.

5 Consider niacin. Also known as vitamin B-3 or nicotinic acid, niacin in supplement form can raise HDL by 35 percent, says Dr. Guarneri. However, niacin at dosages sufficient to affect cholesterol levels (typically between 1.5 and 3 grams a day) also carries the risk of liver toxicity, so take only under a doctor's supervision. Although drug companies are working on combining a drug with niacin to reduce the flushing effect many people experience, the "flush-free" forms of niacin currently sold don't elevate HDL. (See our May 2007 issue for steps to reduce flushing.)

TIPS

FOR LIVING WELL

■ Among **berries**, a cup of wild blueberries has the most antioxidants—more than twice the amount in strawberries. Berries hold six of the top 11 spots for antioxidant-rich foods.

• Seeking an **integrative** medicine clinic? A listing of 38 health centers in North America is found at imconsortium.org/cahcm/members/home.html.

• Try diffusing **anger** by firmly grasping your right middle finger with your left hand and breathing slowly and deeply for a minute. Repeat on the other hand to stimulate acupressure points that may cool a hot head.

• The typical American **diet** has 15 to 17 times more omega-6 fatty acids than it does omega-3s, an imbalance that may help to explain the rise in heart disease and depression this past century.

• **Men** who took 15 or more pills a week of ibuprofen, aspirin, or acetaminophen were almost 50 percent more likely to develop hypertension as men who rarely took them, finds one study.

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HEALTH IN THE NEWS

Alternative Therapies Ease Symptoms After Cancer Surgery

When acupuncture and massage were given to cancer patients after surgery, they helped take the edge off pain and depression. For two days following surgery, 45 cancer patients received conventional care while more than twice that number got standard treatment plus acupuncture and massage. Participants who received the alternative therapies had a greater decline in postoperative pain and also felt less depressed. (*Journal of Pain and Symptom Management*, March 2007)

Comment ► I hope these encouraging results will lead to greater use of these therapies in cancer patients, allowing them to receive lower doses of conventional medications (all of which have undesirable side effects) following surgery.

One High-Fat Meal Stresses the Heart

Healthy young adults who ate a high-fat breakfast showed a greater response to stress two hours later compared to people eating a low-fat meal with the same amount of calories and sodium. The high-fat group ate a fast-food breakfast containing 42 grams of fat, while the low-fat eaters had cereal bars, yogurt, and skim milk with roughly 1 gram of fat. Then, both groups had their blood pressure tested while placed in stressful situations, like solving math problems or speaking in public. Blood pressure readings were one-and-a-half times higher in the high-fat meal group than those consuming low-fat fare. (*The Journal of Nutrition*, April 2007)

Comment ► This small study is interesting, since a noticeable effect was seen after a single meal. Still, the mechanism responsible for this response remains unclear.

Kids Breathe Easier with a Mediterranean Diet

A traditional Mediterranean diet during childhood appears to protect against asthma and allergies. In a study of nearly 700 children on the Greek island of Crete, parents completed questionnaires about their children's diet and their symptoms of asthma and respiratory allergies. Researchers found that consuming grapes, oranges, apples, and fresh tomatoes regularly helped protect youngsters against wheezing and nasal allergies, while eating nuts at least three times a week also reduced wheezing. A high consumption of margarine, on the other hand, doubled the chances of asthma and nasal allergies. (*Thorax*, April 2007)

Comment ► Asthma and nasal allergies have an inflammatory basis, and the olive oil- and produce-rich Mediterranean diet is an anti-inflammatory eating plan. By comparing margarine (made with pro-inflammatory fats) to foods containing healthy fats, the study also suggests types of fat may be an important risk factor.

Chondroitin Fails to Relieve Osteoarthritis Pain

A popular supplement for joint pain appears ineffective for treating osteoarthritis-related knee or hip pain—at least without its common partner, glucosamine. In a review of 20 trials, involving more than 4,000 men and women aged 50 to 67 with osteoarthritis, scientists found no benefit from taking at least 800 mg daily of chondroitin compared to a placebo or no treatment. Although few side effects were seen, researchers conclude that the use of chondroitin should be discouraged due to its lack of benefit. (*Annals of Internal Medicine*, April 17, 2007)

Comment ► I'm not surprised by these results, and there is little evidence for chondroitin's effectiveness when used alone. I recommend taking 1,500 mg of glucosamine daily (with or without 1,200 mg of chondroitin) to treat osteoarthritis. Take these remedies on an empty stomach in two to three divided doses.

A Farm Bill for Public Health

The upcoming vote to renew the farm bill this September can forever change the American diet. That's because the link between farm bill subsidies and poor health in this country can no longer be ignored. Two of the largest crops backed by the farm bill—corn and soybeans—are used to make high-fructose corn syrup and soy oil, cheap ingredients that are significant contributors to obesity, diabetes, and other chronic disease. In addition, this bill helps shape school lunches, affects the cost of food, and determines what is grown locally or imported. It should be renamed the food bill.

Subsidies are the reason it's cheaper to have a soda with chicken nuggets and French fries for lunch than it is to have a fresh salad. As Daniel Imhoff points out in his new book *Food Fight: The Citizen's Guide to a Food and Farm Bill* (Watershed Media, 2007), of the \$112 billion US taxpayer dollars spent on commodity subsidies between 1995 and 2004, more than 80 percent went to just five crops: corn, cotton, wheat, rice, and soybeans. And the feed for livestock from some of these crops is so highly subsidized today that the largest producers of hogs, chickens, cattle, and dairy goods often pay less than the cost of production for their feed, which significantly cuts their operating costs. At the same time, fruit and vegetable farmers receive almost no subsidies.

I'm not suggesting we simply start to subsidize fruits and vegetables, but instead use some of the money that has historically financed an unhealthy diet to create incentives to encourage more small farms, affordable produce, and organic agriculture. Price definitely influences food choices: Studies have found that when the prices of fruits and vegetables are lower, people buy more of them, and that would improve the nation's public health.



Andrew Weil, MD

The Rise and Fall

The cost of fresh vegetables and fruits increased nearly 40 percent between 1985 and 2000, while the price of soft drinks fell by almost 25 percent.

Three Simple Solutions for Food Cravings

In my 20s, I craved Coca-Cola and ice cream, perhaps like many of you. But these days, on the rare occasions that I'm tempted by a not-so-healthy food like chips, I'll use breath work to nip this desire in the bud. Below are three tried-and-true ways to help short-circuit your food cravings and quell their frequency over time.

1 Do the 4-7-8 Breath Technique

This exercise is easy and requires very little time and no equipment. Sit upright with your back straight. Place the tip of your tongue against the ridge of tissue just behind your upper front teeth, and keep it there throughout the entire exercise. Close your mouth and then quietly inhale through your nose to a mental count of four. Next, hold your breath for a count of seven. Exhale completely through your mouth, while making a *whoosh* sound, for a count of eight. This is one breath. Now inhale again and repeat the cycle three times for a total of four breaths. By the time I've completed this relaxing breath technique, my food craving will have passed. Use this exercise whenever you're yearning for a certain type of food, and these urges should become increasingly less frequent.

2 Use Cognitive Approaches

Try to mentally prepare yourself in advance for cravings, says Judith Beck, PhD, a Philadelphia-based cognitive therapist and author of *The Beck Diet Solution* (Oxmoor House, 2007). She suggests writing messages on index cards to read every morning and whenever a craving strikes. One card might remind you why to resist these temptations in the first place. For example, "If I resist this craving, I'll be healthier, I'll feel more in control and stronger, and I won't feel at the mercy of food." Cards can also list alternative activities to do rather than giving in to a food urge, like taking a walk, calling a friend, sipping water, brushing your teeth, or reading about healthy eating. Cognitive exercises can help keep future food cravings at bay by "strengthening your resistance habit," says Beck.

3 Apply Some Acupressure

The Tapas Acupressure Technique (TAT) combines acupressure with a specific mental focus to help tame your food craving. While you focus on the craving, apply light pressure to three acupuncture points: With your thumb and ring finger of one hand, touch the inside corner of each eye, as if you were giving the bridge of your nose a gentle squeeze. Place the middle finger of your same hand midway between, and about 1/2 inch above, your eyebrows. And place the palm of your other hand on the back of your head, so the thumb is resting at the base of the skull. Hold these points for 30 seconds, then shift your focus onto a positive image, such as a healthier food, while holding the same points for another 30 seconds. Repeat this practice as needed. For more on TAT, visit tatlife.net. 

My Top Remedy Choices for 6 Common Conditions

For some health concerns, I consider certain natural remedies clear favorites, like cranberry juice or extract for urinary tract infections, saw palmetto for an enlarged prostate, and tea tree oil for athlete's foot and nail fungus. Yet, more than one remedy may fill the bill for other ailments, presenting an either-or choice. Here's my best advice for treating six common maladies.

ANXIETY ▶ Kava or valerian? Of these two herbs, I'd suggest using **valerian** first. Although kava is better studied, valerian has a better side-effect profile. Used for centuries in Europe to treat anxiety and insomnia (see below), valerian proved helpful for generalized anxiety disorder in one 2002 study. And an earlier trial found it calmed healthy people in stressful situations without making them feel sedated. It remains unclear exactly how valerian works. To ease anxiety, take 400 to 900 mg of valerian per day in divided doses, and choose a product standardized to contain at least 0.8 percent valerenic acid. You may need to take valerian for several weeks to notice benefits.

Kava, which comes from the South Pacific, has a lot of positive evidence going for it. A 2003 review of 11 placebo-controlled studies concluded it was an effective treatment for anxiety. Other research has compared the herb to anti-anxiety drugs and found it equally beneficial. Kava contains substances called kavalactones that have relaxing properties. Unfortunately, the remedy was linked with rare cases of liver dysfunction a few years ago, and I still don't recommend it to anyone with liver disease. More recent research leads me to believe it's safe for everyone else, but users should have their liver function checked periodically as a precaution. A typical dose is 300 mg a day of a product standardized to contain 70 percent kavalactones.

COLDS ▶ Andrographis or echinacea? I've had good results with both of these herbal treatments for colds, but **echinacea** is more widely available and tends to be cheaper. While the scientific evidence for this immune-enhancing botanical is mixed, products made with the above-ground parts of *Echinacea purpurea* (one of the herb's three major species) have yielded the best results, says David Kiefer, MD, a Program in Integrative Medicine graduate Fellow who now teaches at the University of Washington and Bastyr University. I find echinacea in tincture form works best: Take one teaspoon four times a day at the first sign of cold symptoms. Echinacea does not appear effective for preventing colds.

Popular in Scandinavia, **andrographis** can reduce the severity and duration of colds. A 2004 review of seven studies concluded it was more effective than a placebo in quelling cold symptoms, and there's preliminary evidence it may help prevent colds too. The herb's key ingredients, called andrographolides, are believed to have immune-stimulating and anti-inflammatory effects. At the onset of cold symptoms, take a tablet containing 4 percent andrographolides four times a day with meals. Andrographis may increase the risk of bleeding when taken with blood-thinning drugs.

DEPRESSION ▶ SAM-e or St. John's wort? For mild and moderate depression, my first choice is **St. John's wort**, since it's better researched and less expensive than SAM-e. At least eight studies have found the herb to be as effective as SSRI antidepressant drugs like Celexa, Prozac, and Zoloft while causing fewer side effects. St. John's wort is thought to work by boosting the brain's levels of serotonin and other neurotransmitters. A typical dose is one 300 mg tablet or capsule three times a day with meals; it can take a month or two before you notice any benefit. Look for products with hypericin and hyperforin, believed to be the herb's active ingredients. St. John's wort may interact with various medications, so consult your doctor before taking it.

The natural remedy **SAM-e** (S-adenosyl-methionine) seems to work more quickly than St. John's wort, often in less than a week, but it's also quite expensive. SAM-e helps the body produce serotonin and other brain chemicals, and several studies suggest it's effective in relieving depression. Yet, many of these trials were small or used injected SAM-e rather than the oral supplement. To use SAM-e, take 400 mg twice a day on an empty stomach. If you can find them, take enteric-coated products of the butanedisulfonate form, which is more bioavailable. SAM-e may trigger manic episodes in people with bipolar disorder and cause stomach discomfort.

INJURIES ▶ Arnica or bromelain? For muscle strains, joint sprains, and minor bruising, I'd go with **homeopathic Arnica**, a highly diluted preparation of the mountain daisy flower. In a recent study, taking this remedy in pill form reduced the bruising after plastic surgery (*Archives of Facial Plastic Surgery*, January–February 2006). *Arnica* might work by inhibiting inflammation of the blood vessels. I like using 30x potency tablets: Take four immediately after an injury, letting them dissolve under the tongue, then four more every hour while awake the first day. The next day, cut back to four tablets every two hours. Then, take four tablets four times a day for a few days. Dr. Kiefer prefers topical forms such as lotions and gels; follow package directions. I use both together.

I'd use the pineapple enzyme **bromelain** (in addition to homeopathic *Arnica*) only if there were significant bruising or swelling after an injury or surgical procedure. Taken in capsule form and absorbed through the GI tract, bromelain breaks down a blood-clotting protein called fibrin, thereby increasing circulation and allowing injured tissues to drain properly. Take 200 to 400 mg three times a day on an empty stomach (at least one hour before or two hours after eating). If you notice itching after taking this remedy, stop using it, as this may signal an allergic reaction. Because bromelain thins the blood, use it with caution if taking blood-thinning drugs, and avoid taking it before surgery.

INSOMNIA ▶ Melatonin or valerian? If you are suffering from jet lag, **melatonin** is best because this neurohormone helps regulate the body's sleep/wake cycles. Take 2.5 mg of a sublingual (under the tongue) tablet at bedtime for a night or two upon your arrival. I sometimes take this dosage for

occasional insomnia, but a much smaller dose (.25 to .3 mg) appears to be more effective if you're taking melatonin for more than a few consecutive nights. Melatonin causes an increase in dreaming in most people, and a few people can't tolerate this supplement because they get nightmares.

Valerian can also be taken for occasional insomnia, but there is some evidence the herb might be more useful for long-term improvement of sleep, says James Nicolai, MD, medical director of the Indianapolis-based Franciscan Center for Integrative Health. In a 1996 study, 121 insomniacs took 600 mg of valerian extract or a placebo before bedtime for 28 days. For the first two weeks, there were few differences between the two groups. But by the study's end, the valerian group was sleeping much better than the placebo group. Take one or two 300- to 600-mg capsules or tablets of a standardized extract a half-hour before bedtime. Valerian may leave some people with a fuzzy feeling in the morning.

MENOPAUSAL SYMPTOMS ▶ **Black cohosh or dong quai?**

My top choice is the herb **black cohosh**, particularly for hot flashes. Although a recent study (*Annals of Internal Medicine*, December 19, 2006) concluded the remedy offered no help

for menopausal hot flashes or night sweats, this trial wasn't well designed, and several other studies have found it helps relieve hot flashes for many women. Recent research suggests black cohosh may work by binding to human opiate receptors, which play a role in regulating body temperature. Start by taking 40 mg daily of a standardized extract such as Remifemin and then increase the dose if needed. (You may need twice that.) Because black cohosh doesn't seem to have estrogenic activity, it's likely safe for women with a personal or family history of breast cancer.

Some women report the Chinese herb **dong quai** relieves menopausal symptoms such as hot flashes, and it's in many herbal combination formulas for menopause. But the scientific evidence for dong quai is pretty thin. A 1997 study found it offered no benefit for menopausal symptoms, but another study published in 2003 showed that one product (not available in this country) containing both dong quai and chamomile reduced hot flashes, insomnia, and fatigue in menopausal women. Dong quai might work by influencing levels of certain female hormones. Take two capsules of the root or a dropperful of the tincture in a little water twice a day, giving it a six- to eight-week trial. **SP**

Beyond Peanut Butter: Other Irresistible Spreads

Having another peanut butter and jelly sandwich? It may be time for a change: Today, you can choose from many other tasty varieties of nut butters, including almond, walnut, cashew, macadamia, and even hazelnut. I tend to use these other, slightly more expensive nut butters instead of peanut butter because I think they're more nutritious.

The Good and the Bad

Peanuts (which are legumes, not true nuts) contain high amounts of plant-based protein (about 9 grams per quarter cup) and are a good source of niacin, which has been linked to a lower risk of Alzheimer's disease. Research also shows peanuts are a rich source of antioxidants. Perhaps that's why one study found eating peanut butter one to four times a week reduced the risk of death from cardiovascular disease.

However, this spread also poses health risks and the fatty acid profile of peanuts is not as good as that of true nuts. In one study, half the peanut butters sampled had detectable levels of insecticide. Peanut butter

may also contain aflatoxin, a natural carcinogen produced by the mold that grows on peanuts. And the common brands frequently contain partially hydrogenated oils, sources of trans fats that increase LDL ("bad") cholesterol while decreasing HDL ("good") cholesterol.

What Are Better Choices?

Even if your peanut butter doesn't contain trans fats, it has lower levels of monounsaturated fat than almond, cashew, and macadamia nut butters. Monounsaturated fat actually lowers LDL without affecting HDL, so while macadamia nut butter might have a higher fat content than peanut butter, most of its fats are still a healthier kind than those in peanut butter. Walnuts contain significant amounts of omega-3 fatty acids, while peanuts have only trace amounts. And almonds contain more calcium, iron, and vitamin E than peanuts, with comparable amounts of protein. Like almonds, cashews are a good source of iron, and they provide significant amounts of copper, essential for the development of connective tissue and bone. Almond and walnut

butters tend to be milder in flavor, while cashew and macadamia butters are sweeter and creamier.

Nut Butter Shopping Tips

Some nut butter manufacturers avoid partially hydrogenated oils by adding palm oil, which can increase the amount of saturated fat. Palm fruit oil is generally healthy, but palm kernel oil is not, so read labels carefully. Two tablespoons of cashew or peanut butter have about 190 calories, almond butter has roughly 195, walnut butter about 200, and macadamia butter contains 230 calories.

I suggest you choose organic varieties since they usually contain only nuts and maybe some salt. Oil separation in organic and natural varieties is normal; a good stir will bring the nut butter back to its proper consistency. Store all nut butters, once they are opened, in the refrigerator to keep them from going rancid (refrigeration also helps prevent aflatoxin growth in peanut butters). You can also keep nuts refrigerated and make your own butters in a blender: Just grind small amounts until they reach the desired consistency. **SP**

New Views on Morning

Morning is my best time of day. It's when I feel the most creative and energetic. Still, I wasn't always a morning person. In high school and college, I had a hard time getting out of bed, but in medical school I had to get up early and my attention slowly changed. I no longer dreaded the dawn and started to appreciate its sense of promise. Now I wake up automatically when the sky gets light. I love the quiet and lack of distraction of that time.

Truth is, I think we're all morning people, diurnal creatures meant to sleep in darkness and become active with light. While there's some evidence that time-of-day preferences might be genetic, I think "night owls" have simply

learned another pattern in a 24/7 urban culture that nurtures this behavior and is less in sync with nature.

Yet, sleep science often gives short shrift to morning awakenings. One sleep specialist who doesn't is my colleague Rubin Naiman, PhD, author of *Healing Night* (Syren, 2006). "Waking up is not a quick biological transition from sleep, as if you're being rapidly rebooted or switched back on. It's a gradual process that has unique possibility as well as heightened vulnerability," explains Naiman. Traditions around the globe encourage a more measured, prayerful, and mindful approach to morning. A slower approach may also be a healthier one since there's a 30 to 50 percent higher risk of heart attacks and stroke in the early morning hours, possibly because endothelial cells lining blood vessels are less flexible then or due to an "AM surge" in blood pressure.

Waking is also a transition zone. You are coming out of the expansive dream consciousness into a groggy half-waking, half-dreaming awareness, making this a wonderful time to find new ideas, inspiration, and healing. Physiological changes are taking place: With awakening, there's a drop in the sleep-sustaining neurohormone melatonin, a steady increase in body temperature, and rising levels of the stress hormone cortisol to invigorate the body.

Another natural energizer is the sun. Naiman aptly describes morning light as the most potent *zeitgeber*, from the German for "time giver." It helps tell the brain what time it is, resets your body clock, and regulates its circadian rhythms. Despite these many payoffs, we're spending more time indoors and getting less natural light: Researchers found that even in sunny San Diego, most people get outdoors for no more than one hour a day.

Morning sun had special significance in a story I shared in my book *Spontaneous Healing* of a Japanese friend who was diagnosed with kidney cancer. Upon returning home following surgery and chemotherapy, Shin Terayama found the morning unbearably beautiful and felt a great desire within to observe the sun rise from his apartment rooftop. When it rose, he felt a ray enter his chest, sending energy through his body. "I felt something wonderful was going to happen. . . . I was just so happy to be alive," he says. This experience inspired Shin to change his diet and improve his lifestyle, as well as to perform the daily ritual of watching the sunrise—the one thing he looked forward to each day. The sun ray penetrating his chest on his Tokyo rooftop became symbolic of a psychospiritual transformation that connected him to a larger kind of energy and initiated his own healing process. ☯

6 Innovative Ways to Rise and Shine

► **Ditch the Alarm.** Awakening to a gagging alarm is less a morning emergence than an emergency. (And if you need to be roused by an alarm, you're probably not getting enough sleep.) I almost never use an alarm clock and find it mentally unsettling and physically jarring when I do. Instead, I wake up naturally when the sky begins to get light. Rather than waking up suddenly and jumping right into activity, I recommend lingering in bed a little and awakening gradually.

► **Capture Your Dreams.** I use the first moments of a new day to fix my dreams in my consciousness. By being receptive to the content of your dreams, you'll be able to tap into your mind's inner workings and may gain fresh insights that can help you with situations and problems in the day ahead.

► **Groom Your Mind.** Besides simply primping and preparing for the day physically, also invest some time and effort in nurturing yourself mentally or spiritually. Choose a conscious trajectory for your waking hours with a brief meditation, prayer, or daily reading. Naiman often turns to Hugh Prather's book *Morning Notes: 365 Meditations to Wake You Up* (Conari Press, 2005), which contains such wisdom as "Instead of trying to force the day I want, let me embrace the day I am given."

► **Set an Intention.** Instead of running through a mental to-do list while still in bed, Naiman suggests selecting an adverb to describe the *quality* of the day you want to have, such as peacefully, slowly, or joyfully. This intention is a thought that orients you to the day ahead and can be carried throughout it to avoid replaying the same old agenda.

► **Bathe in Light.** Head outdoors for a dose of morning light, when rays are clearest, freshest, and cleanest. Natural sunlight brightens moods and warms the soul. And it stimulates serotonin, a wakefulness neurotransmitter that energizes and improves mental focus. Take a brisk walk, or sit on your patio or near a sunny window and absorb the rays.

► **Go Media Free.** For a few days, skip reading, watching, or listening to the news first thing in the morning. The goal isn't to become less informed, but to notice any difference in your mental outlook during the day. People often start the day with the news because they are looking for a quick jolt of drama-mediated adrenaline to mask sleepiness, says Naiman. This pulls us too abruptly into the day, entraining us to the culture rather than to nature. "Satisfy your inclination for morning newness by exploring more natural changes in yourself and your environment," he suggests.

Ask Dr. Weil Testosterone; Osteopenia; Emphysema; & More

Is a natural nasal spray called Sinus Buster, which contains a hot-pepper extract, safe for sinus problems?

This homeopathic product is probably safe, but it wouldn't be my first choice for easing congestion. The maker of Sinus Buster claims this product—which has minute amounts of capsaicin, a compound from hot peppers that gives them their fire, along with eucalyptus oil—will relieve congestion and swelling, as well as ease some headaches. Sinus Buster also claims that three squirts daily in each nostril can prevent recurring congestion and sinus headaches. There is little evidence to back up the product's claims, and while studies suggest activation of the capsaicin receptor in the nose can ease sinus problems, it's not clear if this homeopathic spray would work by the same mechanism. Instead, I suggest a eucalyptus steam inhalation to loosen mucus and soothe inflamed mucous membranes. Make your own steam bath by adding a couple drops of eucalyptus oil to a pan of water; once the water has come to a boil, cover your head with a towel and inhale the steam, blowing your nose as needed.

Can you explain your warning in the February issue that button mushrooms are toxic?

White or "button" mushrooms (crimini and portobello mushrooms come from the same species) contain agaritine, a natural compound known to be carcinogenic. Natural carcinogens found in other foods, including celery, peanuts, and smoked foods, generally aren't considered harmful, but research on agaritine and white "button" mushrooms concerns me; animal studies suggest that the carcinogen may promote tumor growth. Although canned mushrooms appear to have less of the carcinogen than fresh versions and dried varieties seem to have higher levels, the amounts found vary greatly; some strains contain eight times more agaritine than others.

In general, I advise against eating a lot of the species and instead opting

for other kinds of health-promoting mushrooms, such as maitake and shiitake. As I mentioned in February, if you choose to still eat white "button" mushrooms, broil them at 415 °F for 10 minutes to reduce the agaritine content (this means a well-cooked mushroom pizza should be fine). Studies on boiling these mushrooms at high temperature have produced mixed results.

I've heard that testosterone levels are plummeting. What do you think of hormone replacement therapy for men over age 45?

I don't think middle-aged or older men should seek out hormone replacement therapy unless there's a demonstrated medical reason for low testosterone levels—an age-related decline isn't necessarily one of them. Unless men are severely deficient in testosterone, getting extra amounts of the androgen as shots, skin patches, or topical gels to counter the natural decline seen with aging is not going to do much to increase energy level, sex drive, or feelings of youthfulness. Two recent review studies reached a similar conclusion: Scientists found

inconsistent evidence of the hormone's effectiveness in treating sexual dysfunction in men and suggested that larger studies were needed to determine its cardiovascular safety (*Mayo Clinic Proceedings*, January 2007). In addition, it's possible that testosterone therapy may increase a man's risk for hormone-dependent cancers of the prostate or breast.

In the research you're referring to, which followed some 1,500 healthy Massachusetts men between the ages of 45 and 79 over the last two decades, men were found to have significantly lower levels of testosterone than 10 or 20 years ago (*Journal of Clinical Endocrinology and Metabolism*, January 2007). Testosterone concentrations in men dropped by more than 1 percent per year between 1987 and 2004, meaning a 60-year-old man in 1987 may have had a testosterone level over 500 ng/dL while his same-age counterpart would fall below 450 ng/dL in 2004 (both of these values are still considered normal). Lifestyle factors such as smoking or obesity were not responsible for the decline, but other health or environmental culprits might be.

Ask Dr. Weil continued on next page

MY TAKE ON Laser Scans for Antioxidant Levels

It sounds like something out of science fiction: You place the palm of your hand on a device that looks sort of like an electric pencil sharpener, and get an immediate, noninvasive measurement of the antioxidant carotenoid levels in your skin. A BioPhotonic Scanner uses a safe, low-energy blue light laser to detect skin carotenoids, and some holistic doctors, chiropractors, nutritionists, and personal trainers offer these low-cost or free scans to their clients. What's the catch? The device's manufacturer is the supplement company Pharmanex. So if you get a scan, you will be advised to start taking one of its antioxidant supplements to improve your Skin Carotenoid Score.

Also, the scanner only measures carotenoids, just one of many types of antioxidant nutrients, although research (sponsored by Pharmanex) suggests skin carotenoid levels may be modestly correlated with blood levels of other antioxidants like vitamins C and E. What's more, the company's own website acknowledges that "unlike other biomarkers that you may be familiar with, your Skin Carotenoid Score does not predict disease or pre-condition of disease." In other words, it has no validity as a screening tool.

BOTTOM LINE I consider this high-tech device a marketing gimmick. Skip the scan, include plenty of antioxidant-rich fruits and vegetables in your diet, and take a good multivitamin/multimineral supplement as insurance. ☞

Is iron from a cast-iron skillet bad for someone who has had cancer, like the iron from red meat is?

It depends on what you're cooking: Making a pancake in an iron skillet shouldn't be a problem, but heating spaghetti sauce might be. Studies show that highly acidic foods, such as tomatoes, can absorb considerable amounts of the mineral when cooked in an iron skillet. One study in the mid-1980s found the iron content of spaghetti sauce increased by more than 5 mg (nearly 1/3 of the Daily Value of the mineral) per 3-ounce serving after heating in an iron skillet, while the iron content of cornbread increased by only 0.2 mg. Foods absorbed even more iron when cooked for longer periods or in a newer pan.

Since iron is a pro-oxidant, and the body cannot eliminate it, getting too much of it could increase the risk of malignant transformation of cells as well as stimulate the growth of existing cancer cells. For these reasons, cancer-related organizations have warned patients against eating red meat, rich

in heme iron, the most easily absorbed form of the mineral.

Because some cancer patients can become anemic after treatment, extra iron from a skillet may not be a problem. However, I would avoid using an iron skillet for acidic foods.

What do you think of taking strontium for osteopenia?

I'd want to see more research on this trace mineral, sold as a dietary supplement, before recommending it for osteopenia (moderate loss of bone). Strontium is a mineral that's chemically similar to calcium and is present in small amounts in soil, foods, and bones. Strontium ranelate is the form shown to strengthen bone and reduce fracture risk, and it's used as a prescription drug in Europe to treat osteoporosis in many postmenopausal women. However, strontium ranelate is not yet available in the United States, and other forms of the mineral used in supplements here, such as strontium carbonate and citrate, have not been as well researched.

Here's my advice for treating osteopenia: Aim for at least 30 minutes of weight-bearing exercise (such as brisk walking) most days of the week, as well as strength training two or three times a week. Eat calcium-rich foods, but be cautious about calcium supplements: Women should take no more than 700 mg of supplemental calcium a day and men should take no supplemental calcium (it may increase the risk of prostate cancer). Take at least 1,000 IU a day of vitamin D3 (cholecalciferol). Also, limit alcohol and caffeine, and quit smoking.

Can you offer any recommendations for someone with emphysema?

This respiratory disease, in which the loss of elasticity in lung tissue causes shortness of breath, requires conventional medical treatment, but there are steps you can take to slow its progression and ease symptoms. Smoking is often the cause of emphysema, so if you haven't already done so, quit now. Practice the 4-7-8 (or Relaxing Breath) exercise detailed on page 3 to help strengthen your lungs and do it whenever you feel "air hunger." Inactivity can worsen this lung disease, so work with your doctor or physical therapist to develop a gentle aerobic exercise routine. Supplement daily with cordyceps, a Chinese mushroom that research suggests may improve lung function. Cordyceps extracts are available at health food stores or online in liquid or capsule form; follow package directions. Eat a produce-rich diet for plenty of antioxidants. Lose any excess weight to reduce the workload on your lungs. And consider seeking out osteopathic manipulation to free up restrictions in your chest movements. **SP**

Send your health questions or "My Take" topics to Ask Dr. Weil, Self Healing, 42 Pleasant St., Watertown MA 02472.

Good for You!

Be Gentle Towards Yourself

When you're in the grip of any negative feeling, try to stop talking to yourself about it and instead cultivate a kind of gentleness within, suggests Massachusetts-based meditation expert Susan Piver. She recommends beginning with the simple relaxation technique below, which is based on the yogic tradition of relaxing around tension. This exercise helps you allow a part of your mind or body to be uncomfortable—without upsetting the rest of you.

"Make a tight fist with your right hand. As you do, notice if your shoulder or jaw also tensed up, or if your eyes are squinting. Perhaps your thigh muscles have clenched or your neck has strained forward slightly. But your shoulder, jaw, eyes, thighs, and neck are not needed to make a fist. Relax them all without relaxing your fist or allowing other muscle groups to get in the picture. You can do the same thing with your thoughts. If you feel angry about all the other times you didn't get what you were hoping for, let the anger be localized only. Relax everything else."

Source: *How Not to Be Afraid of Your Own Life* by Susan Piver (St. Martin's Press, 2007)

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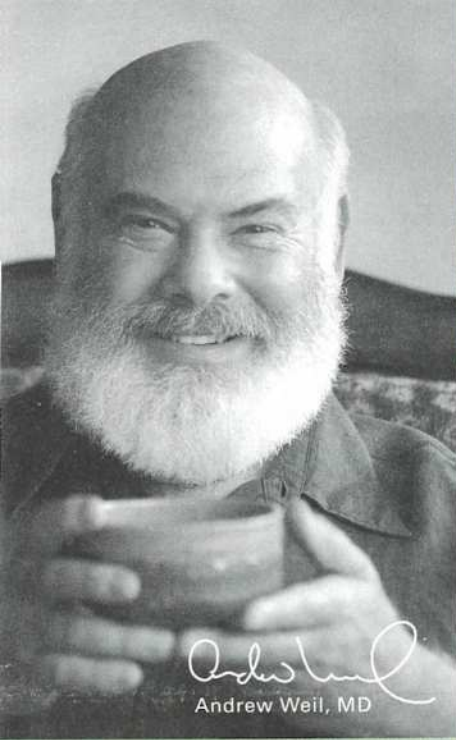
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Andrew Weil, MD

Dr. Andrew Weil's

JULY 2007

self healing

CREATING OPTIMUM HEALTH FOR YOUR BODY AND SOUL

My Favorite Summertime Remedies

Although a longtime resident, I've had a tough time handling Tucson's excessive summer heat the longer I've lived there. Maybe it's planetary warming, ozone layer depletion, or that I'm simply getting older. With advancing age, skin thins and sweat glands produce less perspiration, making it harder to keep cool and increasing heat sensitivity. So now I escape the burning desert heat by heading north to Canada for the summer months. There I enjoy more leisure time, more outdoor activity, more hours of daylight, and more dining al fresco. Whether you're relaxing on a patio deck, beach towel, or picnic blanket, here's my advice for navigating the season's delights and minor inconveniences.

Backyards & Barbecues ▶ With the summer months and more people spending time outdoors, insects have a field day. To make **mosquitoes** buzz off, I use natural repellents containing geraniol, an herbal product. It's safer and almost as effective as the toxic chemical DEET. Note that mosquitoes are attracted to dark colors, especially blue, and are also fond of scented soaps, lotions, shampoos, perfumes, and colognes. If I do get bitten, I'll put Tiger Balm, a Chinese herbal salve, on the area.

If you have a close encounter with a **bee** or **wasp**, I recommend putting ice on the sting to reduce pain and swelling plus slow the spread of the venom. Scrape the bee's stinger out rather than pulling on it, then cover the bite with calamine lotion or a paste made from baking soda and water.

Outdoor **grilling** and dining are two joys of summer. I like tossing fish or veggies from my garden on my gas grill for supper. But barbecuing red meat, poultry, or fish can produce cancer-causing compounds known as heterocyclic amines if you blacken them. Avoid that, and marinate flesh foods beforehand with antioxidant-rich ingredients like citrus juice, turmeric,

ginger, and garlic to reduce the formation of carcinogens almost completely. (One-half cup of marinade is needed for every pound of food.) For additional cancer protection, I would also advise never eating charred meat and not inhaling the smoke from animal fat after it drips onto hot charcoal while you are barbecuing.

Sand & Surf ▶ The sun's warmth is very inviting, but when you overdo it, cool a **sunburn** with aloe vera gel. Applying aloe to inflamed skin can lessen the "ouch" and encourage healing. Soaring temperatures can also affect skin in ways that go beyond burning or tanning. The scorching heat can cause sweat glands to overreact, become plugged up with moisture, and produce an excess of *Staphylococcus* bacteria, resulting in **prickly heat**. This heat rash, which tends to occur on areas such as the inner thighs, elbow creases, under the arms, or beneath the breasts, may settle down as your body gets acclimated to hot weather, but my top choices to soothe the itching or prickly feeling are aloe gel or calendula lotion.

The season's sticky weather also encourages the growth of fungi that cause **athlete's foot** and thrive in damp places like swimming pools, showers, and locker rooms. To treat the itchy areas around the toes or soles of the feet, I suggest applying tea tree oil or grapefruit seed extract, two natural remedies with antifungal properties.

continued on page 3

TIPS

FOR LIVING WELL

■ **Green** exercise, or ecotherapy, may beat the blues. British experts found that a half-hour walk in a park eased depression and raised self-esteem, but strolling in a mall increased tension.

■ Foods that **drop** on the floor need more time than the "five-second rule" to be contaminated by bacteria. Tests found that wet foods like apple slices were safe to eat after 30 seconds; dry foods like cereal were fine after 60.

■ Eating an apple **peel** a day keeps the doctor away. Research suggests the skin is the top source of the fruit's cancer-protective compounds. (Select organic apples to avoid agrichemical residues.)

■ Men, **control** your mid-section. Bigger waists may mean higher PSA levels and a greater risk for erectile dysfunction.

■ **Motivational** interviewing may help to make lifestyle changes. Counselors ask questions and people come up with their own solutions to potential obstacles. It helped women to lose weight and keep it off. 

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HEALTH IN THE NEWS

Fish, Vitamin D May Preserve Eyesight

Eating fish and getting enough vitamin D can reduce the risk of age-related macular degeneration (AMD), the most common cause of blindness after age 60. In a recent study, older people who ate more than two servings of fish a week were 39 percent less likely to have advanced AMD than those who ate less than a serving a month. The omega-3 fatty acids in oily fish may protect the eyes by improving blood vessel function and reducing inflammation. In another study, people with the highest blood levels of vitamin D had a 40 percent lower risk of early AMD than those with the lowest levels. Like omega-3s, vitamin D may have anti-inflammatory effects. (*Archives of Ophthalmology*, May 2007)

Comment ▶ These findings offer one more reason to eat fish regularly and take at least 1,000 IU a day of vitamin D3 (cholecalciferol).

Weak Link Established Between Multivitamins and Prostate Cancer

Overconsuming multivitamins may increase a man's risk of dying from prostate cancer. In a study that tracked nearly 300,000 men aged 50 to 71 for five years, scientists found no link between multivitamin use and early or localized prostate cancer. But they did find that taking more than seven multivitamins a week raised the risk of advanced prostate cancer by about 30 percent and doubled the risk of fatal prostate cancer. (*Journal of the National Cancer Institute*, May 16, 2007)

Comment ▶ The overall data from this study show no relationship between multivitamin use and prostate cancer, and the evidence in the high-consumption group is weak. Other factors, including a family history of prostate cancer, raised the risk in this group, suggesting that multivitamin use may not be the culprit.

Strength Training Helps Rejuvenate Older Muscles

Regular strength training may be a fountain of youth for skeletal muscles at the cellular level. Scientists took thigh-muscle samples from 25 healthy, active people aged 65 and older and 26 younger persons both before and after half of the older group completed an hour-long series of 12 resistance exercises twice a week for six months. Researchers found that the older crowd's muscle tissue underwent dramatic changes that improved functioning of the mitochondria, the cells' energy centers, and restored a youthful look to muscles. (*PLoS One*, May 23, 2007)

Comment ▶ Resistance exercise increases muscle strength and size, but now comes intriguing evidence of its powerful effect at the cellular level, where it can partially reverse the changes associated with aging after just six months.

Eating Tomatoes May Not Benefit Prostate Health

Contrary to most research, a new report suggests that eating foods rich in lycopene (like tomatoes) and other carotenoids may not prevent prostate cancer. In the controversial study, more than 1,500 men aged 55 to 74 were followed for up to eight years using blood tests, diet and lifestyle questionnaires, and routine exams. Researchers found no evidence that lycopene helps prevent prostate cancer and observed a link between an increased risk of aggressive forms of the disease and men with the highest blood levels of beta-carotene, another carotenoid. (*Cancer Epidemiology Biomarkers & Prevention*, May 2007)

Comment ▶ This is a poorly designed study, and researchers measured carotenoid levels in the blood, rather than in the diet. The results are contradicted by large, well-conducted studies reviewed by the FDA, which allows the health claim on tomato products that consuming them may reduce the risk of prostate cancer.

Spending Too Much Time on the Internet?

I'm often online to check on health news, but for some people, Internet overuse can pose threats to emotional and physical well-being. In a 2006 survey of some 2,500 adults by Stanford University researchers, a surprising number of Americans showed addictive symptoms associated with Internet use: 14 percent reported it was hard to stay away for several days at a time, 9 percent tried to conceal their Internet habits from loved ones or employers, and 6 percent acknowledged their use had caused relationships to suffer. Other researchers say physical symptoms of computer addiction can include dry eyes, carpal tunnel syndrome, migraines, back pain, and sleep disturbances.

While Internet addiction has yet to earn the status of a disorder in the American Psychiatric Association's diagnostic manual, I think it's a real phenomenon. People can have specific addictions to cyberporn, online gambling, chat rooms, web surfing, interactive games, and even eBay.

If your time in cyberspace is creating real-world problems for you or loved ones, here are tips for cutting back. Set reasonable time limits for use, and write in your calendar when you'll let yourself go online and when you won't. Replace some of your online activities with their real-world equivalents: For instance, call a friend rather than emailing her, or shop at an actual store rather than browsing online. If you're using the Internet to escape from depression, anxiety, or relationship issues, get counseling to address the underlying problem. There are also support groups for Internet addicts; just watch the time you spend in online groups! For more, see *netaddiction.com* or *Caught in the Net* by Kimberly Young, PhD (Wiley, 2001).



Andrew Weil, MD

A Bad Bet

More than one million young people aged 14 to 22 use Internet gambling sites on a monthly basis, report University of Pennsylvania researchers.

My Favorite Summertime Remedies continued from page 1

I love cooling off in the water, so I take steps to avoid **swimmer's ear**. But you don't need to be practicing your crawl stroke or diving off a dock to get it. Although more common in summer or in humid climates, this painful and itchy infection can occur year-round if moisture gets trapped in the outer ear after showering or bathing, or when the ear canal gets clogged with wax. My all-time favorite remedy to ward off swimmer's ear is to mix equal parts white vinegar and rubbing alcohol in a dropper bottle. I place a few squirts in each ear after I take a dip.

I'm picky about where I swim, so I won't go in or around **chlorinated pools**, which I consider toxic. If you must use one, wear goggles to avoid eye irritation and rinse off when you get out. One recent study found that swimming instructors and other people who spend a lot of time around chlorinated pools up their odds for respiratory problems, likely from inhaling chlorine byproducts (*European Respiratory Journal*, April 2007).

One significant ocean hazard is a **jellyfish** sting. Put hot water or white vinegar on the area as soon as possible to inactivate the stinging cells. Wash the area with saltwater, not fresh, which may worsen pain. Dry the area, then apply aloe.

When you're spending time on the water, ginger can help say *Bon Voyage* to **seasickness**, and it can also ease mild queasiness during a road trip or flight. The spice is as effective

as Dramamine, yet it won't make you groggy as that drug does. A half-hour before traveling, take two to four capsules (a total of 1,000 to 2,000 mg) of powdered ginger or eat 2 or 3 candied slices to keep nausea at bay. Another drug-free option I've used with great success when my stomach sends out a distress signal is an acupressure wristband called Sea-Band that presses on the P6 point inside the forearm and above the wrist. 

My herbal travel kit. When I go away, I typically pack these four trusted natural remedies to treat some common ailments.

Tea tree oil. This natural disinfectant smells like eucalyptus and comes in handy to quell skin infections or, when diluted, to wash and clean wounds.

Arnica. I apply tincture of arnica as a liniment for bruises, sprains, sore muscles, and swollen joints, and I would also take homeopathic preparations (tiny tablets) at 30X potency of this daisy derivative to keep inflammation and pain from a fall or injury in check.

Astragalus. If I feel a cold coming on, I'll turn to this immune-boosting Chinese herb. I take 500 mg three or four times a day.

Aloe. The plant's clear gel is a quick-acting balm for sunburns and kitchen or campfire burns. It also soothes minor cuts, scrapes, and scratches.

3 Cutting-Edge Treatments for Depression

Depression is sometimes called the common cold of mental disorders, and no wonder: In any given year, nearly 15 million US adults (or 7 percent of the population) experience clinical depression, though not all are diagnosed. Prescription antidepressant drugs are the most common treatment, but let me tell you about three new approaches with fewer side effects that can reduce symptoms significantly or even ward off depression altogether.

① Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy

One of the most troubling aspects of depression is that it tends to recur. At least 50 percent of those who experience a first episode of depression will suffer from it again. After a second or third episode, the risk of recurrence jumps to between 80 and 90 percent. To prevent such relapses, many patients end up staying on antidepressants indefinitely. But a trio of British and Canadian researchers has developed a drug-free therapy that's been shown to reduce recurrence.

Mindfulness-based cognitive therapy (MBCT) combines mindfulness meditation, which involves remaining aware of thoughts and bodily sensations without judging them, and cognitive therapy, a form of psychotherapy that helps people see the connection between their thoughts and feelings. In people who have been depressed before, even mild sadness can trigger an excessive amount of negative thinking. These individuals may brood over questions like "What's wrong with me?" or "Why can't I just pull myself together?" But rather than helping, thinking this way makes people feel worse and may lead to another bout of full-blown depression.

In MBCT, patients learn to accept undesired feelings as they *come and go* instead of trying to push them away, and mindfulness practice helps people to focus on the present moment rather than dwelling on past regrets or future worries. In a 2000 study of 145 people with a history of recurrent depression, about half participated in an eight-week MBCT program that included attending weekly classes and doing 45 minutes of mindfulness exercises each day at home; the other half skipped the program. A year later, researchers found MBCT cut the risk of relapse by *half* in those with three or more previous episodes of depression. Another study in 2004 produced similar results.

University of Toronto psychotherapist Zindel Segal, PhD, one of the developers of MBCT, acknowledges that taking the time to do the mindfulness exercises requires motivation (that's why the program isn't meant for those who are currently depressed). But he also says participants like doing something to nourish themselves: "In the midst of a busy life, you can access moments of quiet and stillness by tuning into your breathing and your body." Segal and his colleagues outline the MBCT program in a new book, *The Mindful Way Through Depression* (Guilford Press, 2007), which includes a CD of guided meditations by Jon Kabat-Zinn, PhD.

My Take ▶ Using mindfulness training to help depression is a novel strategy in the West, though meditation has long been used for this purpose in Eastern cultures. I'd love to see this sensible therapy gain professional support.

② Therapeutic Lifestyle Change (TLC)

University of Kansas psychologist Steve Ilardi, PhD, suggests depression results from the mismatch between the modern world and human organisms designed to function well in a Stone Age environment. For 99 percent of the time that humans have existed, they lived in hunter-gatherer cultures, he notes, and many aspects of this ancient way of life are associated with antidepressant effects. Our ancestors were physically active, got lots of sunshine, slept after nightfall, lived in tight communities, and consumed lots of omega-3 fatty acids from wild game and fish. "We were never designed for the sedentary, indoor, socially isolated, poorly nourished, sleep-deprived reality of modern life," asserts Ilardi.

He and his colleagues developed the Therapeutic Lifestyle Change program so depressed individuals could reclaim the mood-boosting elements of Stone Age life while keeping their cars and computers. The program combines group therapy with six lifestyle changes, each of which has previously been shown to reduce depressive symptoms:

1 Omega-3s. Take 1,000 mg of the omega-3 fatty acid EPA per day, the most studied dose for combating depression, plus a multivitamin. Many brands of fish oil contain only about 200 mg of EPA per capsule, so check labels.

2 Aerobic exercise. Get 30 minutes of aerobic activity (like brisk walking) at least three times a week to release the body's "feel good" endorphins.

3 Light exposure. Get 30 minutes of daily exposure to sunlight to help regulate the circadian rhythms that govern sleep, energy, and hormone levels. (You can use sunscreen, but skip the sunglasses, says Ilardi.) Alternatively, sit in front of a special light box that simulates natural sunlight.

4 Social connection. Social support acts as a buffer against depression, so schedule at least two social activities a week, and limit time with people who bring you down.

5 Adequate sleep. Because chronic sleep loss increases the risk for depression, aim for eight hours of shut-eye a night. Dim lights an hour before bedtime, and go to sleep and wake up at the same time each day.

6 Anti-rumination strategies. Rumination is a tendency to dwell on negative thoughts. Because this occurs most often when alone, avoid extended periods by yourself. If you find yourself ruminating, call a friend or do something pleasant.

The initial results from this 14-week program have been impressive. In an ongoing study of about 80 men and women with depression, 74 percent of the TLC group recovered fully or had a sizable reduction in symptoms, compared to only 16 percent of a control group treated mainly with antidepressants or psychotherapy. For more, visit psych.ku.edu/TLC.

My Take ▶ Whether our ancestors had an antidepressant lifestyle or not, it seems like a great idea to combine these six natural measures for easing depression.

③ The Estrogen Connection

Women are twice as likely as men to experience depression, but only between puberty and menopause. Depression can occur in some women who are more sensitive to the natural

fluctuations in estrogen levels, suggest Karen Miller, PhD, a neuropsychologist at UCLA Medical Center, and Steven Rogers, PhD, a psychologist at Westmont College in Santa Barbara, California. Their new book, *The Estrogen-Depression Connection* (New Harbinger, 2007), looks at mood changes at various stages of a woman's life.

During puberty, rapid changes in estrogen levels can make adolescent girls more prone to depression. In women with PMS, the decrease in estrogen and increase in progesterone during the final phase of the menstrual cycle can be linked to depression, irritability, and anxiety. When women give birth, the estrogen levels that have built up during pregnancy drop dramatically, helping to explain why some 10 to 20 percent of new mothers develop postpartum depression.

The menopausal transition, when estrogen levels also fall sharply, is another time of increased vulnerability. Miller tells me that women who have a history of PMS, depression, or postpartum depression are at greater risk for depression during this time. Plus, research suggests "the change" can bring on depression in women with no history of the disorder: Scientists followed 231 premenopausal women for up to eight years and found the transition between perimenopause and

menopause was associated with a five-fold increase in depression risk (*Archives of General Psychiatry*, April 2006).

There's no "one size fits all" treatment for menopause-related depression. If a woman has no family history of breast cancer and is having significant menopausal symptoms like hot flashes, Miller advises her patients to consider hormone replacement therapy (HRT). For women at increased risk of breast cancer or who don't want to use HRT, she might suggest taking an SSRI antidepressant. As for herbal remedies, a recent review concluded St. John's wort (most trials used 900 mg a day) and black cohosh (typically 40 mg a day) seem most useful in alleviating symptoms of depression during menopause (*Menopause*, May/June 2007).

My Take ▶ I'd suggest taking the herbs mentioned above (plus fish oil) for depressed mood during menopause before turning to HRT or antidepressants. If you opt for HRT, I'd go with 17-beta estradiol, a bioidentical hormone sold as Estrace, Climara, and Vivelle. If you also need supplemental progesterone to protect against endometrial cancer, I prefer oral micronized progesterone, a plant derivative sold as the prescription drug Prometrium. Use these hormones for a limited period (say, a year), not indefinitely. **SP**

Choosing the Best Sunscreen: A Refresher Course

In a recent poll, nearly one-third of US adults admitted they don't use sunscreen while more than 70 percent of people applied it incorrectly—not before sun exposure but only once outdoors. To use sunscreen wisely and simplify shopping, follow these three steps.

Get enough protection. Choose a "broad-spectrum" sunscreen that safeguards against ultraviolet A and B (UVA and UVB) radiation. UVB rays contribute to cataracts and cause sunburn by damaging the outer layer of skin involved in basal cell and squamous cell carcinomas. UVA rays penetrate deeper, where they contribute to wrinkling and sagging skin as well as melanoma.

Sun protection factor (SPF) refers to a product's ability to block UVB radiation only; there's not yet a rating system for UVA protection. If you're fair skinned or have a history of skin cancer, then every bit of sun protection helps, says Diane Berson, MD, a New York-based dermatologist, "but with a higher SPF number, the incremental increase is less." (SPF 15 protects against 93 percent of all UV rays; 30 blocks out roughly 4 percent

more.) I use SPF 30 products, a good idea since people typically apply too little sunscreen anyway.

Analyze ingredients. Sunblocks, like those made with the minerals zinc oxide or titanium dioxide, physically reflect the sun's UVA and UVB rays, while sunscreens with chemicals like avobenzone (Parsol 1789) or ecamsule (Mexoryl SX) absorb them and offer mostly UVA protection. "Both products are good," says Dr. Berson, "it's about preference."

I prefer products with microfine zinc oxide (Z-Cote), an active ingredient that's transparent with a light texture. It offers extensive UVA and UVB protection, and its micron particles sit on the skin's surface; smaller nanoparticles may penetrate it.

More plant-based substances including green tea, soy, feverfew, and lycopene are turning up in sunscreens. These may have some anti-inflammatory and even antioxidant benefits to further protect against sun damage, says Dr. Berson. Other natural ingredients such as aloe or chamomile might help soothe sun-exposed skin or make products smell better, but they are not solar shields.

Maximize the coating. The more sunscreen you put on, the more protection you'll get, says Zoe Draelos, MD, a dermatologist in High Point, North Carolina. She recommends lotions or creams (rather than sprays, gels, or powders) to get the thickest application possible. Lotions may also be best for dry or sensitive skin.

Gels are a good choice for oily skin, but may feel gooeey. And sprays might work well on hairy areas. But the fine mist can miss areas, making for an uneven application. Stick sunscreens can cover hard-to-reach spots around the eyes and mouth. Powder sunscreens might easily fall off, since there's little to stick them to skin.

Whatever form you prefer, apply one ounce of the sunscreen at least 20 minutes before heading outdoors, thickly coating those easy-to-miss places on the hands, feet, neck, ears, and backs of the knees. While expiration dates on sunscreens are not required, older ingredients may lose effectiveness or irritate skin. **SP**

For more information on specific ingredients found in sunscreens, visit epa.gov/sunwise/doc/sunscreens.pdf.

Smart Solutions for Six Meatless Eating Blunders

I stopped eating meat in the 1970s and was a lacto-vegetarian for 15 years, meaning I still consumed dairy products, although in small quantities. By the mid-1980s, I became convinced that fish was healthy and began to include it in my diet, but my meals are still mainly plant-based. When people switch to a vegetarian or vegan diet (the latter includes no animal products) or just decrease their meat consumption, I've seen and heard about many blunders. Here are six common mistakes that people make and simple ways to avoid these dietary pitfalls.

1 Overloading on dairy and refined carbohydrates. When replacing meat, many people will fall into the trap of substituting it with processed or familiar foods, like white sugar, white bread, and dairy. Wendy Kohatsu, MD, an integrative physician at Oregon Health and Science University and a culinary student, calls this the “cheese pizza and Coke vegetarian diet.” Eating this way provides too much fat and too many refined foods and artificial ingredients. And swapping meat for more dairy foods isn't the healthiest approach: Dairy products are a poor source of iron, can inhibit its absorption, and are a major contributor to saturated fat intake, explains Brenda Davis, RD, author of *The New Becoming Vegetarian* (Book Publishing Company, 2003) and *Becoming Vegan* (2000). **The solution** ▶ To optimize nutrition and cut back on meat, eat a whole foods diet of legumes, whole grains, seeds, nuts, fruits, and vegetables. Replace meat mostly with legumes (including whole soy foods) and substitute calcium-rich vegetables for some dairy. To boost calcium, I eat sardines (with bones), along with plant foods such as sesame seeds, collards, and broccoli. But there are also many fortified foods on the market, such as calcium-enriched orange juice and tofu. And be creative. It's easy to rotate a handful of the same meals, but you may miss out on essential nutrients. Davis suggests trying at least one new recipe a week and joining a vegetarian group or organizing vegetarian potlucks.

2 Skimping on fruits and vegetables. I don't think most people include enough produce in their diet, whether they eat meat or not. **The solution** ▶ Davis recommends vegetarians and vegans (and mostly meatless eaters, too) strive for nine or more daily servings of fruits and vegetables, one to three servings of legumes, three or more servings of whole grains, and one or more servings of nuts or seeds. And make sure more than half your plate is filled with a rainbow of colorful produce to maximize phytonutrients. A lack of these essential plant-based nutrients has been linked to many chronic diseases, including cancer and diabetes, and each color has unique health benefits.

3 Believing the protein myth. Many people believe meat is the best source of protein, but sufficient protein can be obtained from plants alone. And contrary to popular belief, complementary amino acids in protein foods do not need to be consumed at the same meal for the body to use them. **The solution** ▶ Vegetarians and vegans can easily obtain my

recommended 80 to 120 grams of protein daily by following the guidelines above and going for variety. For example, for 50 grams of protein you would have to drink 6 cups of cow's milk, consume 9 eggs, or eat 1.25 cups of tofu, says Davis.

4 Relying too much on soy products for protein. I'm a big fan of soy foods, but urge you to choose them wisely. Fractionated soy products, such as meat analogues based on soy protein isolate, lack nutrients that are abundant in whole soy foods. **The solution** ▶ Look for whole soy foods such as edamame, soy nuts, soy milk, miso, and tempeh.

5 Omitting essential nutrients. Reducing or eliminating meat might result in some dietary shortfalls. Since purslane is the only vegetable containing omega-3 fatty acids, vegetarians and vegans are at a significant disadvantage in getting these essential fats as well as enough vitamin B-12 and zinc. And since heme iron is more readily absorbed from red meat than plant sources, the recommended intake of iron for vegetarians is nearly twice that for non-vegetarians. **The solution** ▶ I recommend taking a multivitamin-multimineral supplement for insurance and an omega-3 fatty acid supplement if you're not eating oily fish at least twice a week. Although fish oil at a dose of 1 to 2 grams a day is the best supplement, people avoiding all animal products can use Neuromins DHA, which is extracted from organically grown microalgae. (Vegans can break the gelatin capsule to get the oil.) The dose needed is lower, since this supplement lacks EPA—another essential omega-3. Take 400 to 600 mg a day of Neuromins DHA and rely on dietary sources of alpha-linolenic acid (ALA), a precursor fatty acid, for EPA. A daily handful of walnuts or a tablespoon of freshly ground flaxseed is a good food source of ALA. (Watch for new products made from algae that provide both EPA and DHA.)

Vegetarians should also supplement with vitamin B-12 at a dose of at least 10 mcg daily or 1,000 mcg once a week, says Davis. A good multivitamin will have 50 mcg. If you're looking for an individual B-12 supplement, try *Spray for Life*.

To get enough iron without eating meat, I suggest cooking in iron pots and consuming iron-rich foods such as blackstrap molasses, cocoa, and leafy greens. Increasing intake of vitamin C when consuming high-iron foods will also boost the mineral's absorption. Many iron-rich foods also tend to be high in zinc. Make sure to get 8 to 15 mg of zinc a day.

6 Sprinkling bran on everything. Bran offers a great way to increase the fiber content of omnivorous diets, but “too much of it can be a huge mistake for vegetarians and vegans, who likely already get sufficient fiber,” says Davis. Wheat bran, not wheat germ, is a highly concentrated source of phytates (a form of phosphorous in plants) that can significantly impair the absorption of minerals that meatless eaters may already be lacking, such as iron and zinc. **The solution** ▶ A little bran as part of a well-balanced diet is fine, but avoid regularly adding it to meals. Legumes are also high in phytates, but should not be avoided. 

Ask Dr. Weil Milk Thistle; Water Filters; Arthritis Pain; & More

My wife gets gas after eating soy products. Are some soy foods better than others in this regard?

Fermented soy products like tempeh or miso should not cause as much gas as other soy foods. Soybeans contain oligosaccharides, complex sugars that can't be fully digested by the body. As these sugars break down in the digestive tract, they can cause flatulence. Since oligosaccharides are heat stable, standard food manufacturing will not break them down. But when soy products are fermented, the sugars are partially broken down, so they are easier to digest and cause less gas.

Start with small amounts of fermented soy products, then gradually increase servings of other soy foods over time, allowing your digestive system to adapt. Taking a probiotic supplement can also make digestion of these foods more efficient. Another option is Beano, a supplement that contains alpha-galactosidase, an enzyme that breaks down oligosaccharides, which helps reduce flatulence. This can be taken in addition to a probiotic.

Can milk thistle interfere with my chemotherapy treatments?

No. This herb has liver-protective properties, and I often recommend it to cancer patients receiving chemotherapy agents that are toxic to the liver or kidneys. For those on chemotherapy agents that aren't toxic to these organs, there's no need for it. Milk thistle contains compounds that prevent harmful toxins from entering healthy cells. These potent antioxidant compounds, called silymarins, fight free radicals and, unlike known conventional medications, promote the regeneration of damaged liver cells. What's more, milk thistle may even have anti-cancer effects of its own: Lab studies found silymarins reduced the growth of breast, prostate, and cervical cancer cells. Such findings may help explain preliminary evidence that milk thistle may increase the effectiveness of certain chemotherapy drugs, such as doxorubicin, cisplatin, and carboplatin.

Although earlier test-tube studies suggested milk thistle may inhibit liver enzymes (cytochrome P450) that break down certain drugs and supplements, increasing the chance of side effects, recent clinical studies do not support this. Milk thistle is quite safe, rarely causing adverse reactions. The usual dose is 150 to 200 mg three times daily with meals; choose products with a silymarin content of 70 to 80 percent. One brand is Thisilyn by Nature's Way.

Are there differences in the amount and type of fatty acids found in wild and farmed salmon?

Yes, farmed salmon can be much lower in omega-3 fatty acids than wild salmon. While all salmon is rich in these healthy fats, research suggests the fat from farmed salmon contains about 35 percent less omega-3s than wild salmon, because salmon farmers often don't provide dietary sources of omega-3s, such as algae and other simple forms of plant life found in the diets of wild salmon. However, farmed salmon tends to have a higher overall fat content, so it retains higher levels of PCBs and over 100 other pollutants

linked to brain damage and cancer. For more on the nutritional content and safety of particular fish, visit seafoodsafe.com or alaskaseafood.org.

Is it better to install a water filtration system for the whole house or just the kitchen?

It depends where you live. You can request a copy of the annual water quality report from your local water department, and you should also have your water tested by a private laboratory. The kinds and levels of contaminants found can help determine the type of water filtration system you need. For example, if only chlorine or lead levels are high, a simple point-of-use (POU) system, like a kitchen faucet mount or shower filter, may be sufficient. But if your water contains elevated levels of several contaminants, a point-of-entry (POE) system may be best; this whole-house system is typically installed after the water meter and filters all of the water entering the house. Some people with POE systems also use a POU unit in the kitchen to ensure the removal of lead that may

Ask Dr. Weil continued on next page

MY TAKE ON Spirulina

Spirulina, a microorganism that gives lakes and ponds their blue-green color, is one of several types of algae that are farmed, dried, and sold as dietary supplements. Manufacturers of these products claim that consuming algae can prevent cancer and heart disease, control weight gain, boost immunity, and treat a slew of ailments, including allergies, gastrointestinal problems, and depression. Although spirulina and other blue-green algae, which are available as dark green powders or in tablet or capsule form, contain small amounts of protein and some vitamins and minerals, there is no good evidence to suggest these health claims are true and research shows these supplements may even be harmful. Spirulina is not generally considered toxic; however, there is good evidence for naturally occurring neurotoxins and liver toxins in related blue-green algae, including a species called *Aphanizomenon flos-aquae* (also known as AFA or Klamath Blue Green Algae), which is widely marketed as a health-promoting supplement.

BOTTOM LINE Some people tell me that blue-green algae supplements boost their energy levels and give them mental clarity, but I'm very concerned about their potential toxicity and recommend not using them. If you feel you must use algae, avoid blue-green varieties, and opt for *green* algae, such as chlorella, from a different family of organisms that does not contain toxins. ☞

corrode from pipes after water enters the home. The nonprofit group NSF International (nsf.org) provides lists of certified filters and distillers, as well as information about water testing.

Do you recommended taking cat's claw to relieve arthritis pain?

I don't usually recommend cat's claw (*Uncaria tomentosa* and *U. guianensis*) for arthritis pain. This medicinal herb, derived from a large woody vine with claw-shaped thorns that grows in South and Central America, has historically been used for a variety of health problems, including arthritis, but there is limited evidence for its effectiveness. One small preliminary study showed a modest benefit to painful joints using 60 mg a day of a highly purified extract from *U. tomentosa* in patients with rheumatoid arthritis who also took the prescription drugs sulfasalazine or hydroxychloroquine (*Journal of Rheumatology*, April 2002). And early research suggests the herb

may reduce pain from knee osteoarthritis, but I would like to see more evidence. Few side effects have been reported, but cat's claw may cause abdominal pain and diarrhea. Women who are pregnant, trying to conceive, or breastfeeding should avoid the herb.

Supplements I often recommend to relieve arthritis pain include a daily antioxidant regimen, which includes vitamins C and E, mixed carotenoids, and selenium, or a good multivitamin; and at least 1,000 IU of vitamin D. You may also want to take a fish oil supplement at a dose of 3 to 6 grams a day. There's some evidence that fish oils, which are rich in omega-3 fats, help reduce joint tenderness and morning stiffness. You can also try Zyflamend, an herbal product from New Chapter, which contains turmeric and other anti-inflammatory herbs. In addition, I often recommend taking 1,500 mg of glucosamine daily (with or without 1,200 mg of chondroitin) to help treat osteoarthritis; take on an empty stomach in two to three divided doses.

Can you suggest some natural remedies for interstitial cystitis?

Several self-care approaches may provide relief from this chronic inflammatory condition of the bladder, which most commonly affects women. Symptoms may include intense pelvic pain, discomfort during sexual intercourse, and a frequent and oftentimes urgent need to urinate.

My first recommendation is to eliminate bladder irritants such as caffeine, acidic foods (citrus fruits, vinegar), artificial sweeteners, spicy foods, and chocolate from your diet. Since not everyone will be affected by the same foods, I suggest you eliminate one food at a time to find out how it may influence your symptoms. Avoid alcohol and tobacco, as these can also bother the bladder. Drinking one to two cups of unsweetened cranberry juice a day (diluted with water or sparkling water) or taking a daily 400 mg capsule of cranberry extract can prevent bacteria from adhering to the bladder wall. The herb uva ursi (400 to 800 mg per day) can help with inflammation of the urinary tract, but is for short-term use only and should not be used with cranberry products. (Cranberries tend to make the urine more acidic, and uva ursi is less effective if the urine has too much acid in it.)

Because stress can worsen symptoms, I recommend practicing a relaxation technique such as breath work, meditation, or guided imagery. And maintain a 24-hour "bladder diary" to record frequency of urination and possible symptom triggers. Finally, work closely with your physician and seek support from family, friends, or groups such as the Interstitial Cystitis Association (ichelp.org). 

Send your health questions or "My Take" topics to Ask Dr. Weil, Self Healing, 42 Pleasant St., Watertown MA 02472.

Good for You!

Nutty Date Cookies

These vegan-friendly cookies, created by Brenda Davis, RD, are sweetened with dates and absolutely delicious.

PREPARATION

Cook dates in boiling water until soft. Drain, then mash them in a bowl and cool slightly. Stir in banana or apple, lemon juice, vanilla, oil, and flaxseed. In a separate bowl, mix flour, baking powder, baking soda, and salt. Pour the flour mixture into the fruit mixture and stir until just blended. Do not overmix. Fold in walnuts. Preheat oven to 350°F. Drop dough by the teaspoonful onto an oiled nonstick baking sheet. Bake for 15 minutes, or until golden brown on the bottom. Makes 2 dozen cookies.

Source: brendadavisrd.com

INGREDIENTS

- 2 cups dates, packed
- 3/4 cup water
- 1 cup mashed banana or grated apple
- 1 teaspoon lemon juice
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
- 1/4 cup oil (expeller-pressed canola or high-oleic versions of sunflower or safflower oil)
- 2 tablespoons ground flaxseed
- 2/3 cup whole wheat flour
- 2 teaspoons baking powder
- 1/2 teaspoon baking soda
- 1/4 teaspoon salt
- 1 cup walnuts, halves or chopped

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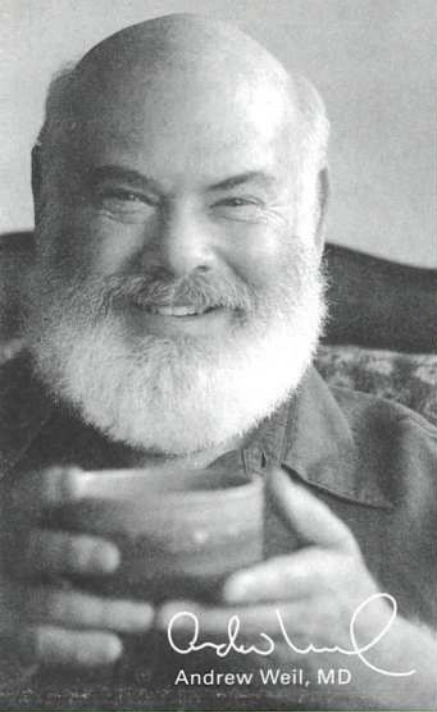
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Andrew Weil, MD

Dr. Andrew Weil's

AUGUST 2007

self healing

CREATING OPTIMUM HEALTH FOR YOUR BODY AND SOUL

The Keys to Building Better Balance

Balance training has been called one of the hottest trends in fitness, and it's an important—often forgotten—part of movement. Good balance is your main safeguard against injury and falls, and it reduces your chances of hurting yourself if you do take a spill.

While people usually perceive balance as a concern only for older people, it's a skill worth developing at any age. That's why exercise physiologist Cedric Bryant, PhD, of the American Council on Exercise suggests investing early in balance. "People spend a great deal of time planning their financial independence, and yet it's their functional independence that may impact their ability to enjoy a nest egg."

I do balance exercise regularly just by spending a lot of time outdoors in the Arizona desert, walking over uneven or wet surfaces as well as rounded rocks. In addition, I've used balance boards and have done weight training while standing on one leg. The benefit for me has been minimizing my risk of falling—I can usually recover my balance in midair.

Many real-life activities require good balance—walking, getting in or out of a car, or putting on pants. Climbing stairs calls for a great deal of it, but you only notice this need when you're older and it becomes harder to feel steady without holding onto a handrail. It's also balance that allows you to return a tennis serve or ski down a slope without falling over. Strong core muscles to maintain your balance and good posture to keep your body aligned can both keep you on an even keel.

Good balance reduces the risk of falls, sprains, and other injuries, and it also helps to improve athletic performance and safety. New findings show that just five minutes a day of balance training reduced the risk of ankle sprains in high-school athletes by 77 percent (*American Journal of Sports Medicine*, August 2007).

Proper balance is based on input from three sensory systems: visual, spatial, and vestibular (located in the ear, this system informs the brain about head position and motion). All three senses diminish with age, and health issues such as hearing or vision problems and diseases affecting the nerves (diabetes, MS) or limiting flexibility and mobility (arthritis) can compound the effects on your equilibrium. Alcohol and certain prescription drugs can also make you feel off kilter.

Gauging the Tipping Point

Typically, as you lose bone density and muscle mass with age, you lose balance too. "Balance starts to decline in the third decade for men and fourth decade for women," says physical therapist Carole B. Lewis, PhD, co-author of the book *Age-Defying Fitness* (Peachtree, 2006), "but you can do something about it. Various studies show that balance improves with training."

Different balance tools can help develop greater stability. A balance board has a plastic or wood surface on a narrow base that wobbles. A BOSU ball (short for "both sides up") is a springy, plastic dome about the size of a beach ball, and a stability disk is an air-filled disk just big enough to place your feet on. Such props introduce an element of instability when you stand, sit, or lean on them. I think they're all equally

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TIPS

FOR LIVING WELL

- Snacking on **soy nuts** may lower blood pressure. Getting some protein from unsalted soy nuts lowered systolic and diastolic pressure in women, plus reduced LDL cholesterol in those women with hypertension.
- Which **sunscreens** are best? Visit ewg.org/sunscreen, a new website that rates the effectiveness and safety of products.
- Get moving, **retirees**. Dutch researchers followed nearly 1,000 working adults into retirement and found that most did not replace their loss of work-related activity with physical activity.
- The **beach** is a great place to practice mindfulness meditation, says Jon Kabat-Zinn, PhD. Smelling the salt air, feeling the sun's warmth, and hearing the waves can heighten your awareness of the present moment.
- The more **entertaining** a TV show, the more you may eat while watching it. An enjoyable program is distracting, so your brain pays less attention to the food's taste or feeling full. 

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HEALTH IN THE NEWS

Stave Off Cancer with Flax and Vitamin D

Consuming freshly ground flaxseed and supplementing with vitamin D may keep cancer at bay, says new research, while shark cartilage appears useless. One study of nearly 1,200 women over age 55 found that those taking 1,100 IU of vitamin D3 and nearly 1,500 mg of supplemental calcium daily had a 60 percent lower incidence of cancer than those not taking these supplements. Eighteen women in the placebo group were diagnosed with cancer two to four years later, compared to 15 in a group only taking calcium and 8 in the calcium and vitamin D3 group (*American Journal of Clinical Nutrition*, June 1, 2007). In another trial presented at the annual meeting of the American Society of Clinical Oncology in June, researchers studied 161 men with prostate cancer, dividing them into four groups. Men either followed their regular diets, took 30 grams of flaxseed daily, ate a low-fat diet, or took flaxseed with a low-fat diet. Tumors grew about 30 to 40 percent slower in men taking flaxseed regardless of diet. A third study presented at the same conference found that shark cartilage extract offered no benefit when combined with chemotherapy and radiation in 384 patients with advanced lung cancer.

Comment ▶ I've long suggested people consume freshly ground flaxseed, especially men at high risk of prostate cancer, and advise all adults to supplement with vitamin D. As for calcium, I don't think it played a major role in this recent study and still recommend women take no more than 500 to 700 mg daily from supplements. I also suggest avoiding shark cartilage extract due to its lack of efficacy and its adverse impact on declining shark populations.

Ginseng Promising for Easing Cancer Fatigue

American ginseng (*Panax quinquefolium*) helped relieve cancer-related fatigue in preliminary data presented at the American Society of Clinical Oncology's annual meeting in June. Mayo Clinic researchers randomly divided 282 cancer patients into one of four treatment groups—those taking 750, 1,000, or 2,000 mg of ginseng daily or a placebo. After two months, participants taking the highest dosages of the herb had more energy and were more active than those getting the lowest dose or no treatment, who felt little improvement.

Comment ▶ This is great news for cancer patients, who often feel worn out and have limited options for regaining their stamina. I recommend cancer patients try Wisconsin-grown ginseng, the variety used in this study. Scientists don't yet know exactly how ginseng restores energy, but they're hoping larger trials of this adaptogenic herb may offer more clues. For more, see ginsengboard.com.

Aspirin Offers Women Heart and Cancer Protection

Women who regularly take aspirin appear less likely to succumb to heart disease or cancer. Researchers tracked more than 22,000 postmenopausal women for 16 years, asking them to periodically complete health questionnaires. Aspirin users were 25 percent less likely to die of heart disease and 13 percent less apt to lose their life to cancer than women who never took the pain reliever. Taking NSAIDs like ibuprofen or naproxen did not appear to have these same effects. (*Journal of the National Cancer Institute*, June 6, 2007)

Comment ▶ Aspirin had a modest effect on mortality in this observational study, which did not look at the dose needed to curb cancer or heart disease. For many, the benefits of low-dose aspirin therapy may outweigh its risks. Ibuprofen may have a greater protective effect than aspirin for Alzheimer's disease; otherwise, aspirin appears more beneficial in reducing the odds of other chronic diseases.

How Healthy Are the Baby Boomers?

Last year, the oldest of the 78 million baby boomers born between 1946 and 1964 turned 60 (I was born before the boom). Many health-conscious boomers tell me they feel younger than their age, as I do, and it's now said that 60 is the new 50 or even 40. So I was somewhat surprised to see a *Washington Post* article (April 20, 2007) citing evidence that boomers are *less* healthy than their parents were at the same age. Boomers are more likely to report difficulty climbing stairs, getting up from a chair, and doing other routine activities. They're also more apt to report pain, alcohol and psychiatric problems, and chronic conditions such as diabetes, high cholesterol, and hypertension. Factors contributing to poorer health may include worsening obesity rates, more sedentary jobs (and longer commutes), and less support from extended families.

Some researchers are skeptical of these findings, pointing to steady increases in life expectancy as an indication of improved health and saying that rising rates of chronic disease may just mean such illnesses are being detected earlier. Boomers may also have higher expectations, making them more likely to be bothered by aches and pains that earlier generations considered a part of aging.

As research continues, I'd like to remind baby boomers—and everyone else—that it's never too late or too early to adopt healthier habits. Pay attention to *all* aspects of lifestyle, including diet and supplements, physical and mental activity, rest and sleep, relationships and stress, and your spiritual well-being. A well-rounded lifestyle will optimize your immune function and help your body adapt to the changes and challenges that time may bring.



Andrew Weil, MD

Great Expectations

In a survey of 800 men and women who just turned 60, 28 percent said their health was better than expected, 39 percent considered it as expected, and 32 percent rated it worse than expected.

The Keys to Building Better Balance continued from page 1

effective, but I'd recommend getting some guidance on using these tools to get the hang of them.

Whatever method you choose to improve your balance, Bryant urges "proper progression": First, practice balance. Start on more stable surfaces and work your way up to more challenging balance postures. "For example, practice balance moves on a flat, steady surface. The next level would be performing exercises while standing on a pillow, then a foam pad, and so forth," he says. Another option is to include motion for a greater challenge—swinging the arms, twisting the torso, looking up or down, or tilting side to side.

"There are two kinds of balance, and you should work on both: static balance (standing or sitting) and dynamic (moving) balance," says Lewis. "And don't focus on just standing balance but sitting balance too."

In addition to props and equipment, you can do balance training in other ways. I often recommend tai chi. One review of 11 studies

suggests that tai chi is linked with better balance control and decreased chance of falls (*Archives of Internal Medicine*, March 8, 2004).

"Yoga improves your proprioceptive or 'felt' sense, which allows your body to sense where it is in space without having to look," says Timothy McCall, MD, who wrote *Yoga as Medicine* (Bantam, 2007). "A steady practice of yoga *asanas* (postures) helps improve your body awareness." He suggests mountain

pose, tree pose, triangle, and revolved triangle to enhance balance.

You can also easily incorporate balance training into your daily routine—no special gear required. I recommend walking on uneven ground, like hiking in the woods. Stand on one leg or on your toes while brushing your teeth, washing dishes, or talking on the phone. Or try standing on one or both legs with eyes closed for 30 seconds—removing visual references adds difficulty. 

Test Your Balance. How steady are you? Find out with these exercises suggested by Carole B. Lewis, PhD, who also recommends practicing them each day to build better balance.

Static balance test ▶ Stand on one leg for 30 seconds; switch legs. Work up to one minute, and then doing this movement with eyes closed. (A healthy 28-year-old can stand on one leg for about 28 seconds, but it decreases to 4 seconds eventually with age. How fast this decrease happens depends on how well you maintain your balance.)

Dynamic balance test ▶ Walk 10 feet, placing each foot heel to toe in front of the other; repeat twice. Trace your finger along a wall at first for extra support, if needed. (If you can't walk 6 feet without stopping or stepping to the side, you're at risk of falling.)

Cut Your Salt in Three Easy Steps

I had a tendency to high blood pressure at an early age, so I learned to consume less salt and my palate quickly adjusted. Although scientists don't fully understand how we taste salt and there is a debate about how much sodium affects health, recent reports suggest that people are consuming two to three times more sodium than is recommended by health professionals. This excess of sodium can cause the body to retain fluid, adding to the workload of the heart and kidneys. If you have a family history of hypertension, stroke, heart or kidney disease, or are salt sensitive, lightening up on the salt in your diet may be particularly important for long-term health.

Because researchers don't fully understand how we detect salt in foods, scientists haven't been able to come up with a good salt enhancer or substitute. "What we do know about salt is that it blocks bitterness and enhances sweetness and that our desire for salt is at least partly related to taste," says Leslie Stein, PhD, a research associate at the Monell Chemical Senses Center in Philadelphia. People given salt pills do not respond the same as those who eat salt, and studies show that after just eight to 12 weeks on a low-sodium diet, people no longer find high-salt foods desirable. So follow my step-by-step plan to rethink your sodium intake and get less of it.

STEP 1 Set a Sodium Goal

Calculate your sodium intake. Tally how much sodium you consume and note where it's coming from in your diet. (Although people often use the words *salt* and *sodium* interchangeably, salt is actually 40 percent sodium and 60 percent chloride.) In general, people consume about 75 percent of sodium from processed and prepared foods, 15 percent from salt added during baking and cooking, and the remaining 10 percent from sodium found naturally in foods.

Know how low you need to go. Average adults might need only 500 mg of sodium daily to regulate fluid levels and keep muscles moving, but the body seems able to handle much more. The US Dietary Guidelines set the daily sodium limit for adults under age 50 at 2,300 mg (1 teaspoon of salt), 1,500 mg for ages 50 to 70, and 1,200 mg for those over 70. But keep in mind that one-half of people with high blood pressure are salt sensitive, and one-quarter of those

What's Shaking?

I never use salt at the table, but in cooking I prefer sea salt that's free of chemical additives.

Table salt is typically iodized; the least expensive choice. *Best for:* Baking since it dissolves easily.

Sea salt offers more minerals, and adheres better to food than table salt. *Best for:* Cooking; more robust flavor lets you use less of it than other salts.

Kosher salt contains almost 25 percent less sodium per teaspoon than table salt thanks to its large crystals. *Best for:* Cooking because of its milder flavor.

without hypertension are thought to be salt sensitive, with blood pressure that's responsive to salt intake. There is no good test to detect this sensitivity, so pay attention to how your body responds to what you eat. Water retention, swelling, and puffiness are signs you need to go easy on salt.

Balance with potassium. This mineral, found in legumes, dark leafy greens, and most fruits, helps balance sodium's effect on the body. Most people get enough from their diet. Only take potassium supplements if prescribed by a doctor.

STEP 2 Make Smart Food Choices

Exclude visibly salted foods. Pass up salted pretzels, chips, nuts, and the like.

Scout out the sodium. Manufacturers use sodium in processed foods not only for taste, but also to extend shelf life, maintain color, and improve texture. As a result, large amounts of sodium can be found in some places where you don't even taste it, such as salad dressings and bread (baking soda contains 1,259 mg of sodium per teaspoon). Also, skip foods with MSG (monosodium glutamate) and limit the use of soy sauce and other salty condiments.

Read labels carefully. "No salt added" does not mean the product is free of sodium. Even fruits and vegetables have low amounts of the mineral. "Sodium-free" means there is less than 5 mg of sodium per serving. "Low sodium" refers to a product with less than 140 mg of sodium per serving, while "reduced sodium" indicates 25 percent less sodium than the original product.

Make rinsing a habit. Canned vegetables, beans, and tuna can have high amounts of sodium. Discard the canned liquid and rinse the food.

Pick naked meats. Meats packed in marinades and sauces are often extremely high in sodium.

Restrict cured meats and brine. Cured meats like ham and bacon are loaded with sodium, as are foods packed in brine like pickles, olives, and sauerkraut.

Defy the menu. When eating out, ask that no salt be added to your food and request dressing on the side.

The Best Sodium-Saving Foods

FOODS	SODIUM SAVINGS
No salt added canned beans	Up to 600 mg per can
Low-sodium soy sauce	400 mg per tablespoon
Low-sodium canned tuna and no salt added canned salmon	450 mg per 6-oz can
No salt added cottage cheese	375 mg per half cup

STEP 3 Retrain Your Taste Buds

Go for the flavor punch. Buy low-sodium foods and cut the salt in recipes by half, then sprinkle a little salt on food if necessary to get the most flavor, suggests Greg Hottinger, RD, a nutrition consultant based in Oakland, California. Some experimentation in cooking, and especially baking, may be necessary. "Using less or no salt in a recipe can change the other things salt does, such as enhancing other flavors and contributing to texture," adds Stein.

Add herbs and spices. Fresh herbs are more flavorful than dried, but dried seasonings can come in handy, says Wendy Kohatsu, MD, an integrative physician at Oregon Health and Science University and a culinary student. But beware of store-bought herb blends; she cautions people that the word *blend* in many mixes often means added salt. To make a versatile dried herb blend lacking sodium, combine ¼ cup parsley, 2 tablespoons tarragon, and 1 tablespoon each of oregano, dill, and celery flakes.

Splash on citrus. Lemon juice and other citrus juices add a zesty flavor to vegetables and fish; vinegars can also enhance taste without adding sodium.

Embrace the onion family. Members of the onion and garlic family provide great sodium-free flavor with antioxidant benefits, says Dr. Kohatsu. To maximize health benefits, she suggests adding garlic and onions toward the end of the cooking process. Sauté these ingredients earlier in the cooking process for a more subtle flavor.

Discover substitutes. Hottinger recommends Bragg liquid amino spray. "It's on par with low-sodium soy sauce for sodium content, but offers a nice even coating compared to sprinkles of salt," he says. You can also try nutritional yeast flakes available at health food stores. "This is not brewer's yeast—it's a different variety that's grown on molasses and contains all the B vitamins and minerals," says Dr. Kohatsu. "These bright yellow flakes taste slightly yeasty, but are more reminiscent of soy sauce and work great as a thickener in many soups or salad dressings."

Consult your doctor before using low-sodium substitutes with potassium, says Hottinger, adding that many of these "light" salts are often consumed to the point of no benefit.

Learn from the Japanese. Use MSG-free and salt-free dried nori seaweed sprinkles or toasted sesame seeds as a topping for rice, salads, and soups, says Dr. Kohatsu. **SP**

MIND-BODY WELLNESS

Innovative Uses of Music & Sound Therapy

I enjoy singing, especially in a group, and I often whistle since I don't play an instrument. I believe both music therapy and sound therapy offer great potential for healing, and lately therapists are combining the two. "Songs use the mind as a doorway in, while sound therapy or tones go straight for the physiological impact," says Joshua Leeds, a sound researcher. Here are some surprising results from two New York-based clinics.

Instruments for breathing easier. Through the Louis Armstrong Center for Music and Medicine at the Beth Israel Medical Center, children and teens in some New York schools are taking action to control their asthma. In its Asthma Initiative Program, kids receive music therapy using a recorder flute. "We've found that kids become more active in controlling their asthma and making music seems to help control their breathing rate," says Joanne Loewy, director of the Center. In addition, they are also drumming to relieve tension and the staff regularly uses singing to help control both asthma and

chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) in adults. Therapists also teach music-assisted relaxation techniques and guided imagery to people with COPD to influence their heart rate and breathing.

Connecting with music. What's new in the field of dementia research is an idea Concetta Tomaino, director of the Beth Abraham's Institute for Music and Neurological Function, wrote about nearly 20 years ago. "It's the notion that people don't lose memory, they just lose access to it," says Tomaino. This may explain why

people with dementia sometimes respond to music and nothing else. "The process of music involves many parts of the brain," explains Tomaino. "When someone with Alzheimer's listens to music, it turns on part of the brain and retrieves a memory." Therapists at the Institute are also using rhythms to trigger a response. "When Alzheimer's patients participate in a drum circle, we have found that their rhythms may start off differently, but eventually the rhythm is shared; subconsciously they know they're connected," says Tomaino. **SP**

Soothing Sounds: Tips for Dementia Caregivers

- Decide whether you want to stimulate or relax the patient, says Leeds, and don't overdo it. "Music is like chocolate—a bite can be plenty."
- If possible, play an instrument or sing to a person while making eye contact. It's more beneficial for the patient than playing a recording.
- Make tapes or CD collections, since dementia patients respond to auditory cues longer than they do visual cues such as photos, says Tomaino. Use music with meaning or tunes from their teenage years.
- Someone with frontal lobe dementia, which involves changes in personality, may also experience a change in musical preference, says Tomaino.
- To find a therapist, contact findMT@musictherapy.org; (301) 589-3300.

New Insights on Parkinson's Disease

Researchers still don't know the cause of Parkinson's disease (PD), which gradually destroys brain cells that produce dopamine, a neurotransmitter that coordinates muscle movement. Until now, treatment mostly managed PD's symptoms—muscle stiffness, tremors, loss of balance, and reduced mobility. But promising research offers hope for preventing or better managing the disease itself.

Strategies for Preventing Parkinson's

Environment. I believe PD is mostly due to environmental injury to sensitive parts of the brain. In fact, three recent trials link pesticide exposure with an increased risk of PD—by up to 41 percent in one study (*Occupational and Environmental Medicine*, May 2007). Reduce your exposure to agricultural chemicals by eating organic foods, avoiding pesticides, and using a home water filter, especially in an agricultural area.

Diet and supplements. New data suggest caffeine may reduce PD risk. "Caffeine affects an enzyme that mediates free radical damage to neurons," says Florida-based neurologist David Perlmutter, MD, author of *The Better Brain Book* (Riverhead, 2004). Instead of coffee, I advise drinking green or white tea—both contain antioxidants as well, and research shows that just two or three cups of tea daily reduces risk.

Inflammation also plays a role in PD. One recent study concluded that PD risk is lower in people who regularly take nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs, or NSAIDs (*Experimental Neurology*, June 2007). While I don't generally suggest taking NSAIDs because they can cause stomach irritation and bleeding, you might discuss taking low-dose aspirin with your doctor, since aspirin offers many other benefits. In addition, I recommend an anti-inflammatory diet containing a wide variety of fresh, whole foods that's rich in fruits and vegetables and low in saturated and trans fats. Research shows that the spices ginger and turmeric work powerfully

against inflammation; use them liberally in cooking and consider taking 1 gram of ginger and 400 mg of turmeric (preferably the whole extract rather than just curcumin) daily with meals. Or take Zyflamend, an herbal anti-inflammatory blend (follow package directions). Dr. Perlmutter also suggests taking fish oil or algae daily. Choose a product with at least 300 mg of DHA, an omega-3 fatty acid vital to brain health.

Exercise. In research presented at the American Academy of Neurology annual meeting in May, middle-aged and older adults who got at least a half-hour a day of moderate to vigorous exercise lowered their odds of PD by up to 40 percent. Previous research indicates that exercising strenuously as a young adult can also reduce risk—up to 60 percent in men (*Neurology*, February 2005). Although researchers aren't sure how physical activity reduces PD risk, one recent animal study suggests exercise changes the way neurons release dopamine (*Journal of Neuroscience*, May 2007).

Overweight. Several studies have found that a higher body mass index increases PD risk. Carrying extra pounds around the middle may up risk even more. One possible reason: Obese people have decreased dopamine receptors (dopamine helps regulate appetite). Also, "fat is metabolically active in terms of inflammation, and it stores pesticides, damaging the brain for years to come," says Dr. Perlmutter.

The Latest Treatment Options

Diet. Neurodegenerative diseases have an inflammatory component, so I advise an anti-inflammatory diet (see above).

Supplements. Recently, researchers have investigated Coenzyme Q10 as a potential treatment for relieving symptoms and actually slowing PD's progression. One promising study found that subjects taking a very high dose—1,200 mg a day—developed less disability during a 16-month trial. However, a more recent study found no benefit from taking 300 mg daily over three months (*Archives of Neurology*, May 2007); these researchers admit their study wasn't conclusive and called for a longer-term study of higher doses. Although the evidence is only suggestive so far, I recommend CoQ10 to PD patients. Dr. Perlmutter says that taking other antioxidants along with CoQ10 regenerates the CoQ10 so you don't have to take as high a dose to see improvement. Since research suggests that oxidative damage likely plays a role in PD, "antioxidants are fundamental," says Dr. Perlmutter. He advises taking 400 mg of CoQ10, 800 IU of vitamin E, 1,000 mg of vitamin C, and 300 to 400 mg of alpha-lipoic acid daily with meals. (I recommend taking only 400 IU of natural vitamin E and 250 mg of vitamin C a day.)

Exercise. Many studies show that gentle exercise such as tai chi, qigong, or physical therapy can improve mobility, balance, flexibility, and strength. Moderate exercise seems to improve the effectiveness of levodopa, a drug used to treat PD symptoms (*Movement Disorders*, February 2007). **SP**

For more, visit parkinsonsaction.org or call (800) 850-4726.

On the Horizon: Creatine

In March, the National Institutes of Health launched a seven-year study on whether creatine, an amino acid sold as a supplement and thought to increase exercise performance, can help slow the progression of PD. Early research suggests creatine might work by protecting mitochondria, which produce energy inside cells, or by acting as an antioxidant. "This is exciting...it's the first time that there is research [on creatine or CoQ10] to target the disease, not just the symptoms," explains Dr. Perlmutter. One study found another potential benefit for PD patients, who typically lose muscle mass as the disease progresses: Those using creatine got better results from strength training than a placebo group (*Neuro-rehabilitation and Neural Repair*, March/April 2007).

Are there any natural treatments for atrial fibrillation?

There are, but because this type of abnormal heart rhythm is potentially serious, I suggest first consulting a cardiologist to get a workup. Atrial fibrillation occurs when the heart's two upper chambers fall out of sync with its two lower chambers. As a result, the heart no longer pumps blood efficiently, causing weakness, lightheadedness, and shortness of breath. Episodes may be sporadic and harmless, needing no treatment, or chronic and life-threatening, requiring medication or other conventional treatments to reset heart rhythm and prevent blood clots.

Regardless of how mild or severe your episodes, you can reduce their frequency by limiting caffeine, alcohol, and tobacco, which can trigger irregular heart rhythms. Likewise, avoid any prescription or over-the-counter drugs that quicken your heart rate and talk to your doctor about possible alternatives. And steer clear of stimulant herbs like guaraná, kola nut, and yerba maté.

To reduce the harmful effects of stress on your heart, practice the Relaxing Breath exercise described in my books or on my recordings at least twice a day. Another way to release tension and keep your heart healthy is by getting regular physical activity.

A produce-rich diet will help to ensure you're consuming enough magnesium and potassium, minerals that may prevent some arrhythmias. I also advise taking 500 mg of magnesium twice a day (as magnesium citrate or a chelated form) and an equal dose of calcium if needed to offset magnesium's laxative effect.

You used to recommend "flush-free" niacin to improve cholesterol, but you recently said it's ineffective. What changed your mind?

My opinion of flush-free forms of niacin—which don't cause the facial redness and warmth that regular niacin can—changed when research showed it doesn't reliably affect cholesterol levels. Many people may not

be able to convert the "bound" or flush-free form of niacin to its active form. The result is that flush-free niacin does not have the same ability as regular niacin to lower LDL ("bad") cholesterol and raise HDL ("good") cholesterol. By the way, flushing is a harmless reaction that often goes away within a week to 10 days of starting niacin therapy.

How do antioxidants in blueberries found in supermarkets compare to those in wild varieties?

Wild blueberries have 33 percent more antioxidants than cultivated ones, and were second only to small red beans in a 2004 study of the antioxidant levels in over 100 different foods. One reason for the difference is the higher concentration of anthocyanin pigments in the wild variety. Anthocyanins are powerful antioxidants that might help prevent cancer, stroke, and cardiovascular disease. Even so, cultivated blueberries aren't nutritional pushovers: They have more antioxidants than strawberries, raspberries, and other berries, and ranked fifth among all foods in the previously mentioned study. I recommend eating blueberries regularly, wild or

cultivated. When buying cultivated berries, choose organic if possible.

Besides conventional methods, what's your advice for treating plantar fasciitis?

If pain medications and cortisone injections haven't helped this common type of heel pain, caused by inflammation of the tissue connecting your heel bone to your toes, I'd experiment with some natural approaches. One recent study (*Journal of Bone and Joint Surgery*, October 2006) found that a specific type of stretch eased symptoms. Sit with one leg crossed over the other, then stretch the arch of the foot by taking one hand and pulling the toes back toward the shin for a count of 10. Repeat this stretch 10 times, doing three or more sets daily. Most participants returned to full activity within three to six months of regularly performing this stretch.

Some of my patients have had success with topical DMSO (dimethyl sulfoxide), a chemical made from wood pulp that promotes healing in inflamed areas; DMSO is available at natural food stores and online. Acupuncture

Ask Dr. Weil continued on next page

MY TAKE ON A Breathing Aid for Blood Pressure

► **What it is:** RESPeRATE is a medical device that guides a person through breathing exercises designed to help lower high blood pressure and promote relaxation. Sold online for \$300 and resembling a portable CD player, RESPeRATE also includes headphones and a sensor that straps around your chest. To use it, you sit and listen for musical tones signaling when to inhale and exhale. The goal is to slow and deepen your breathing rate to less than 10 breaths a minute to reduce blood pressure.

► **The evidence:** In data from six small studies, the paced breathing device helped reduce systolic (top number) pressure by an average of 14 points; diastolic (bottom number) pressure dropped about 8. These effects were seen within a month of regular use (at least 40 minutes a week) while users remained on any prescribed blood pressure medication.

BOTTOM LINE I think this is a very good system based on the same idea as the breathing exercises I teach; both affect the autonomic nervous system, the root of blood pressure problems. Of course, it's less expensive to learn breath work from a recording or yoga class, but the real payoff of regular practice may come from using less medication for hypertension. 

and reflexology can also help alleviate pain. Some people report relief from wearing magnetic insoles, but studies suggest these pricey inserts are no more effective than foam cushioning.

Are there alternatives to wearing an oxygen mask for sleep apnea?

Lifestyle changes can help prevent obstructive sleep apnea, in which the soft tissue in the rear of the throat relaxes during sleep and blocks the airway, causing you to briefly stop breathing throughout the night and to wake up feeling tired. But the most effective treatment is a continuous positive airway pressure (CPAP) machine, which keeps the airway open by blowing air through a mask. My colleague Randy Horwitz, MD, medical director of the Program in Integrative Medicine and a sleep apnea sufferer, says that wearing the mask at night took some getting used to at first, but now he can't believe how much more energy he has during the day.

Whether or not you use a CPAP machine, I suggest the following measures. Lose excess weight, which may reduce fat around the neck, widening the airway. Don't sleep on your back: Gravity makes it more likely for the tongue or other tissues to block the airway. Avoid alcohol, sleeping pills, and sedative herbs like valerian, all of which can relax airway muscles further. And don't smoke, which can worsen swelling in the upper airway.

What is your opinion of tooth whitening products?

I'm not opposed to using them. Most tooth whitening options available—from over-the-counter gels, toothpastes, strips, and trays to whitening agents from a dentist—contain chemical bleaches that are relatively safe, but can increase tooth sensitivity and damage enamel. Tooth whitening is best for people with healthy, unrestored teeth (no fillings) and gums. Those with yellow tones to their teeth

(as opposed to gray or brown) respond best. Whitening products aren't recommended for pregnant women or children under age 16, people allergic to peroxide, or those already at risk for sensitivity (gum disease, exposed roots, or worn enamel). In addition, cavities need to be treated before undergoing a whitening procedure, as the bleach in these products may penetrate existing tooth decay, causing discomfort and possible infection.

Choose over-the-counter whiteners that carry the American Dental Association's Seal of Acceptance. A list of these products can be found at ada.org. Dentist-supervised treatments tend to cost more, but can be customized and contain higher concentrations of the bleaching agents, which produce more immediate and lasting results.

What do you think about using ultrasound at home for pain relief?

Iwouldn't recommend it. Therapeutic ultrasound devices use high-frequency sound waves to create heat and encourage blood circulation in an injured area. Although this treatment may help relieve joint and muscle strains as well as increase range of motion, it's most often used by physical therapists, athletic trainers, and orthopedic physicians. While you can find ultrasound equipment available for home use, I would talk to your doctor or physical therapist before pursuing this therapy, since using the equipment without supervision can be risky and might exacerbate an injury. For more about ultrasound therapy or to locate a physical therapist, visit apta.org. 

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next issue

Easing Chronic Pain

Foods for Your Eyes

Best Forms of Vitamins

New Heart Tests

Good for You!

Refrigerating Produce: A Crib Sheet

Think twice before you put fresh fruits and vegetables into your refrigerator. Cold storage is not always a smart move for produce. Refrigerating a tomato, for example, breaks down the compounds that give the fruit its flavor and fragrance, says chef Russ Parsons.

Cold temperatures usually slow down the respiration, or "breathing" rates, of fruits and vegetables as well as their transpiration, or ability to give off moisture. While this often extends shelf life, in some cases it causes damage or spoilage. The solution? Refrigerate all fruits and vegetables not listed here, along with cut-up produce.

Never Refrigerate

- Bananas and Plantains
- Potatoes and Sweet Potatoes
- Storage Onions and Garlic
- Tomatoes

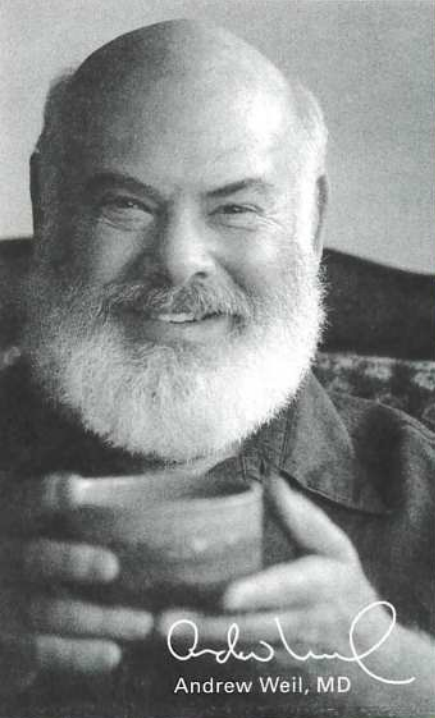
Refrigerate Only Briefly (no more than three days)

- Cucumbers
- Eggplants
- Melons (only after fully ripened)
- Peppers

Refrigerate Only After Fully Ripened

- Avocados
- Peaches, Plums, and Nectarines
- Pears

Source: How to Pick a Peach: The Search for Flavor from Farm to Table by Russ Parsons (Houghton Mifflin, 2007)



Andrew Weil, MD

Dr. Andrew Weil's

SEPTEMBER 2007

self healing

CREATING OPTIMUM HEALTH FOR YOUR BODY AND SOUL

TIPS

FOR LIVING WELL

- Go ahead and have **chocolate** every day. Eating just a quarter ounce of dark chocolate a day lowered systolic and diastolic blood pressure without increasing weight or other health risks.
- Get more out of your **workout** by taking a short break. Men who cycled for 30 minutes, rested for 20 minutes, and then pedaled for another 30 minutes boosted their metabolism more than when they exercised for an hour straight.
- An easier and healthier way to **grocery-shop**: Use the 5 and 20 rule to read food labels. Look for 5 percent or less of the Daily Value of saturated fat, sodium, and cholesterol, and 20 percent of vitamins, fiber, and calcium.
- Go heavy on the **broccoli**: Eating it more than once a week can slash a man's risk of aggressive prostate cancer by about 50 percent. (Cauliflower counts, too.)
- Group cardio-fitness classes can improve **depression** symptoms in women when antidepressant medication doesn't work, one small study suggests.

Which New Heart Test Is Right for You?

Regular cholesterol tests can play an important role in determining your heart disease risk. Yet studies show that over half of all first heart attacks occur in people with normal cholesterol levels. As research continues to deepen our understanding of heart disease, new tools have emerged to help improve risk assessment and detection. Below, I'll highlight three of the latest tests and, along with Chicago-based integrative cardiologist Stephen DeVries, MD, evaluate them.

CRP: C-reactive protein is a blood marker for inflammation in the body. An elevated CRP level may indicate a higher heart disease risk (in women it's a better predictor than LDL cholesterol). Some cardiologists regard this inexpensive blood test as helpful in determining treatment for borderline patients—those at moderate risk. Others feel it's less useful, saying it can't distinguish between acute inflammation (caused by an infection, for example) and chronic inflammation linked to cardiovascular disease. Due to a lack of evidence, the American Heart Association has recommended CRP testing only for those at moderate risk.

Bottom line: Dr. DeVries believes the CRP test is valuable. "Clearly, inflammation plays a role in heart disease, and tests like CRP can pick up problems beyond the traditional cholesterol screen," he says. Likewise, I think checking CRP levels should become part of the routine screenings for everyone, not just one risk group.

Coronary calcification scan: Also known as electron-beam computed tomography (EBCT), this noninvasive test involves lying on a table inside a doughnut-shaped scanner. Images are analyzed to detect calcium deposits, which can narrow and harden arteries—a condition known as atherosclerosis. A high calcium score indicates the presence of coronary calcification

and a greater likelihood of a cardiovascular event. This news can motivate some patients to make lifestyle changes. On the other hand, a low score may give others a false sense of security. The test cannot detect all forms of atherosclerosis, and since there is limited research on its effectiveness, most health insurers don't cover it.

Bottom line: As Dr. DeVries says, normal results are not always accurate and abnormal results are not conclusive. Skip it unless you have a few risk factors, in which case it may be helpful along with other tests in gauging the extent of risk.

64-slice CT scan: Like the coronary calcification scan, this test involves lying on a table inside a scanner for 15 minutes. Multiple (64!) snapshots are taken to create a three-dimensional image of the heart "in action." The image is sensitive enough to detect narrowed arteries and the presence of fatty deposits without subjecting patients to an invasive angiogram. Yet this test is not for everyone. Drawbacks include exposure to dye and radiation, plus most health insurance companies don't cover it.

Bottom line: For patients with chest pain or a mildly abnormal stress test, the scan can help determine the need for further invasive testing. Otherwise, I think the costs outweigh the benefits.

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HEALTH IN THE NEWS

For Heart Health, Ditch the Daily Soda

Drinking even one diet or regular soft drink a day may lead to conditions associated with cardiovascular disease and diabetes. Researchers looked at data from more than 9,000 middle-aged men and women collected over four years and concluded that those who drank one or more sodas a day had a nearly 50 percent greater risk of developing metabolic syndrome, a cluster of risk factors including a large waist circumference, high blood pressure, elevated triglycerides, low levels of HDL ("good") cholesterol, and high blood sugar levels. (*Circulation*, July 2007)

MY TAKE ▶ I'm not surprised that soda contributes to metabolic syndrome, though the small amount required to see the effect is shocking. We know that high-fructose corn syrup, found in regular sodas, is a prime suspect in metabolic syndrome. The artificial sweeteners in diet sodas, the caramel added to soft drinks, and the substitution of sodas for healthier beverages may also play a role.

Obesity May Be Contagious

Having a spouse, friend, or family member who becomes obese may raise your risk of following in their footsteps. An analysis of 32 years' worth of obesity data on more than 12,000 people suggests that someone's chance of becoming obese increases by 57 percent if he or she has a friend who becomes obese, 40 percent if it's a sibling, and 37 percent if it's a spouse. Researchers also found that when someone lost weight and was no longer obese, friends and family tended to lose weight too. (*New England Journal of Medicine*, July 26, 2007)

MY TAKE ▶ Obesity is becoming so common that it's often seen as normal. The good news from this study is that healthy habits seem to be contagious as well.

Protect Your Knees with Vitamin C

Eating a diet rich in vitamin C and other antioxidants may lower the odds of developing osteoarthritis of the knee, report Australian researchers. At the study's start, 293 middle-aged adults—all free of knee pain—filled out dietary questionnaires. Ten years later, their knees were examined using MRI scans. People with higher dietary levels of vitamin C were less likely to have bone abnormalities that contribute to knee arthritis. Intake of fruit (a prime source of vitamin C) and dietary levels of the carotenoids lutein and zeaxanthin (both found in green vegetables) were also linked to better bone health. (*Arthritis Research & Therapy*, July 6, 2007)

MY TAKE ▶ Vitamin C is necessary for the synthesis of connective tissue, including cartilage. The exact protective role of antioxidants here isn't clear, but it's a good idea to get plenty of them, for their health-protective effects.

Echinacea Does Fight Colds

Although some recent research has questioned the effectiveness of echinacea against colds, a new analysis of trials concludes that the herb helps prevent colds and reduces its symptoms. Researchers pooled data from 14 studies involving 1,630 adults and children who had been randomly assigned to take echinacea or a placebo. Echinacea reduced the risk of catching a cold by 58 percent and shaved nearly 1.5 days off the duration of a cold. (*Lancet Infectious Diseases*, July 2007)

MY TAKE ▶ This is great news that I hope reduces—rather than adds to—confusion about echinacea. There's good evidence for products made with the above-ground parts of *Echinacea purpurea*, so check labels. I suggest taking one teaspoon four times a day at the first sign of cold symptoms. If you are around someone with a cold, taking echinacea for a few days may help prevent you from catching it.

Should Calories Be on Restaurant Menus?

You may soon find something new on in-store and drive-through menu boards at some fast-food restaurants—the number of calories per serving. On July 1, a New York City law went into effect requiring mostly chain restaurants and fast-food outlets to post calorie counts next to food prices, although it won't be enforced until October. Also in July, the King County (Washington) Board of Health approved a similar law—to take effect next summer—that will also require chain restaurants to display calorie, fat, sodium, and carbohydrate information on printed menus.

All told, approximately 20 states, cities, and counties are currently considering menu-labeling legislation or regulations to help consumers make better-informed choices and to stem rising rates of obesity. But the new measures don't come without controversy: Although some restaurant chains in New York City (including Subway) are already complying with the law there, others are refusing to change their menu boards, and the state restaurant association has filed a lawsuit against the city, calling the regulation unconstitutional. The city's health department shot back, "It is unfortunate that some restaurants are so ashamed of what they are serving the public that they would rather go to court than share this information with their customers."

I favor nutrition labeling at all restaurants, including calories, nutrient (carbohydrate, fat, and protein) breakdowns, and fiber and sodium content. You may not go to McDonald's for health food, but did you know its grilled chicken club sandwich has more calories (570) than a Big Mac (540)? That's largely because the chicken club weighs about 20 percent more.



Andrew Weil, MD

That's a Mouthful

In one study, dietitians estimated that a typical meal of a hamburger and onion rings in a sit-down restaurant would have 865 calories. It actually contained 1,550.

MIND-BODY WELLNESS

Easy Pick-Me-Ups for an Afternoon Slump

Many people experience an energy plunge in the afternoon: The morning caffeine buzz has worn off, and blood sugar levels may bottom out a few hours after lunch. Besides eating a healthy snack (like a handful of raw nuts), here are three more ways to recharge your body and reawaken your mind when you have an energy shortage.

Breathe for Energy

When I feel tired during the day, I'll take a short nap, go for a walk, or practice the Stimulating Breath. This quick pick-me-up works faster than drinking a cup of coffee: Sit with your back straight and place the tip of your tongue against the ridge of tissue behind your upper front teeth. Keep it there throughout the exercise. Inhale and exhale rapidly through your nose, with your mouth lightly closed. Your breaths in and out should be equal in duration, but as short as possible. Try this for 15 seconds to start. Then add 5 seconds each time you do the exercise, until you reach one minute. You should feel muscular effort at the base of your neck above the collarbones and at the diaphragm (touch these spots to get a sense of movement). Afterward, you may feel revived the way you would after a good workout.

Shake Sleepiness Off

To fight fatigue, try movement and a little laughter. Laughing gets your body moving, makes you breathe harder, and also helps you to let go of physical and emotional tension that can easily sap your energy, says Jeffrey Brantley, MD, director of the Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction Program at the Duke Center for Integrative Medicine and coauthor of *Five Good Minutes at Work* (New Harbinger, 2007). He suggests first taking a moment to acknowledge feelings of stress and paying attention to where stress and weariness seem strongest in your body. Then, whether standing, sitting, or lying down, let your body start to move and gently shake where you feel the most tense. As you shake, add some fun and surprising sounds to the movement, such as laughter. You'll loosen up your body and your smile.

Splash Fatigue Away

Your mind may feel overloaded and your body tense after the first part of the day, so it's important to clear the morning's effects and start fresh in the afternoon, says Ann Marie Chiasson, MD, an Arizona-based integrative physician and energy-medicine practitioner. She suggests splashing cool water on your face and the back of your neck and washing your hands. Imagine the water washing away tension and fatigue. Afterward, replenish energy by moving your body for 5 to 10 minutes. She advises going for a short walk or practicing this qigong pose: Stand with your knees bent and feet shoulder length apart, then gently bounce up and down. Tap firmly with closed fists on your lower abdomen (two to four inches below the bellybutton), which is considered the body's core energy center. **SP**

Best Foods for Your Eyes

As you grow older, your eyes may become more vulnerable to chronic conditions that can weaken your vision considerably. But eating an abundance of antioxidant-packed foods each day should help shield against disease and keep your eyesight sharp.

The most common cause of vision loss in older adults, **age-related macular degeneration** (AMD) occurs when cells in the macula (the area of the retina responsible for central vision) break down, causing progressive loss of visual acuity. **Cataracts**, which impair vision in about half of people aged 65 to 74, develop when free-radical-damaged proteins clump together and cloud the lens. And **dry eye syndrome**, a painful condition not linked to vision loss, often results from an age-related decrease in tear production.

For overall eye health, wear UV-protective lenses when you're outdoors during the day, avoid tobacco smoke, and keep your blood sugar under control (type 2 diabetes is a leading cause of vision loss). I would also include the following vision-protecting foods in your diet and suggest getting antioxidants from a high-quality multivitamin/multimineral.

Green leafy vegetables. Kale, spinach, collard greens, and other leafy greens are loaded with lutein and zeaxanthin, two carotenoids known to increase your defenses against AMD and cataracts. As the main carotenoid in the retina, lutein protects your macula from sun damage, which is a known risk factor for both conditions.

Building up a healthy amount of lutein and zeaxanthin in the macula depends on your dietary intake, according to Robert Abel, Jr., MD, a Delaware-based ophthalmologist and author of *The Eye Care Revolution* (Kensington, 2004). A study published in the *Archives of Ophthalmology* in August 2006 also reveals the importance of these two carotenoids: Among 1,787 women aged 50 to 79, those with high lutein and zeaxanthin intakes were less likely to have AMD.

Foods to Avoid

Staving off age-related macular degeneration, dry eye syndrome, and cataracts isn't just a matter of selecting foods that support eye health—you also need to know which foods can contribute to impaired vision. Consuming trans fats, saturated fats, and foods with a high glycemic load (foods made with flour and sugar, especially) can overwhelm your liver, which ultimately has a negative impact on eye function. For optimal eye health—and for whole-body wellness—I strongly recommend staying away from quick-digesting carbs and bad fats and curbing your consumption of the omega-6 fatty acids found in red meat and many vegetable oils. The easiest way to do this is to avoid processed, manufactured, and fast food as much as possible.

Eggs. Green leafy vegetables aren't your only options for lutein and zeaxanthin. In an October 2006 study from the *Journal of Nutrition*, 33 older adults who ate an egg a day for five weeks significantly boosted their levels of both pigments—without raising their cholesterol or blood fats. Eggs also provide sulfur compounds that may prevent cataract formation, says Dr. Abel. For those who enjoy eggs, I'd consider a daily serving to be a healthy and effective way to increase your intake of vision-enhancing antioxidants. Choosing omega-3-fortified eggs can also supply you with DHA, another nutrient needed for healthy eyes.

Squash and sweet potatoes. Yellow and orange fruits and vegetables (including carrots, cantaloupes, and pumpkins) are another source of carotenoids, such as beta-carotene (the vitamin A precursor necessary for normal vision and retinal function). Although it's essential to work a variety of carotenoid-rich foods into your diet, also consider taking a multivitamin or mixed-carotenoid supplement that delivers 15,000 IU per day of mixed carotenoids, including beta-carotene, lutein, and zeaxanthin.

Whole grains and legumes. Found in high concentrations in the retina, zinc (available in whole grains, nuts, legumes, poultry, and fortified cereals) is critical for the function of many retinal enzymes. This trace mineral may also play a key role in thwarting AMD: In 2003, experts estimated that if the 8 million Americans over age 55 at high risk for advanced AMD took daily supplements containing 80 mg of zinc, more than 300,000 of them could avoid vision loss. However, since taking more than 30 mg daily can interfere with other minerals that also benefit eye health (such as copper and magnesium), Dr. Abel advises choosing a multivitamin that provides no more than 15 to 30 mg of zinc.

Fish. Also crucial for retinal function, the omega-3 fatty acid DHA (plentiful in salmon, black cod, and other cold-water fish) provides structural support to retina cell membranes. It may be particularly helpful for people who suffer from dry eye syndrome: A study of 32,470 women found that those who ate at least five servings of canned tuna weekly had a 68 percent lower risk of dry eyes compared to women who consumed only one serving a week (*American Journal of Clinical Nutrition*, October 2005). Although tuna is high in DHA, other fatty fish, such as salmon and sardines, contain lower levels of mercury. If you're not eating several servings of fish each week, I recommend upping your DHA intake by supplementing with 2 to 3 grams of fish oil daily.

Onions and garlic. The antioxidant glutathione is essential for lens health and may help keep cataracts from forming. But you can't get it directly from foods: After you consume sulfur or certain amino acids, your body manufactures glutathione in the liver. Onions, garlic, shallots, and capers all contain sulfur, but people with existing cataracts or AMD may want to up their intake by supplementing with a glutathione booster. Dr. Abel suggests alpha-lipoic acid (250 mg twice a day) and N-acetylcysteine (600 mg twice a day). 

What I'd Take: A Vitamin and Mineral Checklist

S hopping for vitamins and minerals can be confusing, especially if key micronutrients are available as different compounds. Below I'll discuss my preferred forms of five supplements and the reasons behind these choices. Some are found in multivitamins, while others are taken as individual supplements.

Vitamin A. A term used to describe a family of compounds found in plant and animal foods, vitamin A includes nutrients essential for maintaining healthy skin and eyes and possibly reducing prostate cancer risk.

Best: Look for a mixture of carotenoids, including beta-carotene, alpha-carotene, lutein, and lycopene. These antioxidants found in fruits and vegetables are converted into usable retinoids by the body and appear to have no toxicity. Look for 15,000 IU of mixed carotenoids, including beta-carotene.

Avoid: Multivitamin products containing preformed vitamin A, often listed as retinol or as vitamin A palmitate or acetate. In lotions, these fat-soluble, animal-derived retinoids may help clear up skin, but taken orally they can build up in the body and harm the liver. Consuming as little as 5,000 IU of retinol a day has been shown in studies to increase the risk of losing bone density and breaking a hip.

Vitamin D. This hormone is primarily known for its role in facilitating the absorption and use of calcium and maintaining bone density. But research is revealing it's the Swiss Army knife of vitamins, with wide-ranging uses and incredible versatility: It is a main defense against cancer, protects cardiovascular health, and regulates immunity. Studies show there are receptors for vitamin D all over the body, including the brain, heart, breast, prostate, and immune cells.

Best: The body can utilize D3 (cholecalciferol) better than other forms. I suggest taking at least 1,000 IU of vitamin D3 per day with a fat-containing meal to ensure absorption. (Although I previously advised 400 to 800 IU

daily, the latest research suggests a greater benefit from the higher dose.)

Avoid: D2 (ergocalciferol), which must be further converted by the body.

Vitamin E. A complex group of eight related compounds that may be especially important in the aging process, vitamin E includes four tocopherols and four tocotrienols (in both cases called alpha, beta, gamma, and delta) with powerful antioxidant, neuroprotective, anti-cancer, and cholesterol-lowering properties. Studies suggest the vitamin helps reduce the likelihood of age-related eye disorders and may hinder Alzheimer's disease.

Best: Since each compound has a unique chemical structure and function in the body, I recommend mixed natural tocopherols and tocotrienols. If you can't find vitamin E with tocotrienols, choose mixed natural tocopherols instead. Take 80 mg of mixed tocopherols and tocotrienols (look for a product with at least 10 mg of tocotrienols) or 400 IU of mixed tocopherols a day. (I used to recommend 800 IU for people aged 40 and older, but it's unclear if this higher dose provides more benefits.) Take with a meal containing fat to ensure absorption.

Avoid: Synthetic dl-alpha-tocopherol. Studies suggest supplements with this form may not be as effective against cancer and heart disease. Also avoid products with only d-alpha-tocopherol; it's not enough of the vitamin E complex.

Calcium. Calcium is a must-have mineral to prevent bone loss, and studies suggest this multitasking nutrient may also help protect against colon cancer, lower blood pressure, ease PMS symptoms, prevent insulin resistance, and act as a neuromuscular relaxant.

Best: Absorption of calcium is tricky. Calcium carbonate, the most common form, requires sufficient stomach acid to be absorbed. Calcium citrate does not, and is a better bet.

Last year, I decreased my calcium recommendations. I now advise that women get no more than 700 mg daily of supplemental calcium (1,000 to 1,200 mg total from food and supplements), while men get 500 to 600 mg from all sources. (Most men should not take any supplemental calcium, except on the advice of a physician.) Always take calcium supplements with food.

Avoid: Calcium carbonate is probably okay for younger folks, but since stomach acid declines with age, calcium citrate is better for those in or beyond midlife. Skip coral calcium, a heavily hyped product that has no proven health benefits, and avoid natural calcium made from oyster shells or bone meal, which tend to contain lead and other toxic metals.

Iron. There is generally no need to supplement with iron unless you've been diagnosed with iron-deficiency anemia. Getting too much of this pro-oxidant mineral may increase the risk of heart disease and cancer. Pregnant women should get supplemental iron from a prescribed prenatal vitamin.

Best: Ferrous gluconate in a liquid form has been shown in studies to be better absorbed and easier on the stomach than ferrous sulfate. Follow package directions and take supplemental iron with 100 mg of vitamin C (or with citrus juice) to boost absorption. Take on an empty stomach.

Avoid: Daily multis with iron. 

The Shopping List

NUTRIENT	BEST FORM
Vitamin A	mixed carotenoids with beta-carotene
Vitamin D	D3 (cholecalciferol)
Vitamin E	mixed natural tocopherols alone or with mixed tocotrienols
Calcium	calcium citrate
Iron	ferrous gluconate

Ahhh! A Guide to Easing Chronic Pain

Chronic pain ranks among the most frustrating conditions. Usually defined as pain lasting longer than four months, chronic pain can make sufferers desperate for relief. Sadly, doctors aren't always helpful, in part because few medical schools teach effective ways to handle this complex problem. But new research is offering a clearer understanding of pain's causes and how to ease it. Pain experts like New York City integrative physician James Dillard, MD, author of the book *The Chronic Pain Solution* (Bantam, 2003), say there are a wide variety of solutions. Here are seven strategies I recommend:

1 Seek out a pain specialist. Find a practitioner who has expertise in chronic pain. Multidisciplinary pain centers, often based at teaching hospitals and medical centers, are one place to look. But not all pain centers are integrative in their approach, warns Randy Horwitz, MD, PhD, medical director of the University of Arizona's Program in Integrative Medicine. The best centers offer a full range of conventional and alternative treatments, from new pain medications to hands-on therapies. He adds that it's ideal to have a sympathetic practitioner "quarterbacking the team," helping you design an appropriate whole-body plan.

2 Master mind-body approaches. I believe this is the most important aspect of chronic pain treatment. Breath work, guided imagery, hypnotherapy, and meditation can raise your pain threshold, in part by triggering the release of pain-fighting chemicals in the brain. These therapies work best when practiced regularly, and using them as soon as you notice discomfort may prevent it from intensifying. One simple but effective technique taught by David Bresler, PhD, president of the Academy for Guided Imagery in Malibu, California, is called "glove anesthesia." Patients relax deeply and then imagine dipping their hand in a powerful anesthetic and placing the hand on areas of the body that hurt. You can learn such techniques by listening to CDs or by working with a guided imagery practitioner.

Why Pain Lingers

Here's how an acute injury, like an ankle sprain, can result in chronic pain:

- 1 Pain originates in peripheral nerves in the ankle and travels up the spinal cord to the brain.
- 2 A constant flow of pain signals along this pathway changes the nerves, spinal cord, and brain. Receptor proteins become overly sensitive, amplifying pain.
- 3 Pain persists even after an acute injury has healed.

Bottom line: Treat acute pain aggressively so it doesn't become a chronic problem.

3 Rethink your pain. Pain is the firing of a nerve *plus* your response to it. Consider, for example, a bodybuilder who lifts weights for two hours. "Every muscle in his body aches, but he thinks, 'Wow, I had a good workout,'" says Pamela Palmer, MD, PhD, director of the University of California's Pain Center for Advanced Research and Education in San Francisco. "A fibromyalgia patient could have the same sensory input and think, 'My life is a disaster.' Your approach to that pain input is your choice." Mind-body approaches can help reframe your experience.

4 Eat an anti-inflammatory diet. Inflammation exacerbates pain, and an unhealthy diet prevents a nervous system in distress from healing. Swap out saturated and trans fats, sugars, and processed foods (all of which promote inflammation) for fruits and vegetables and foods rich in omega-3s, including cold-water fish and walnuts. Season your meals with turmeric and ginger. These spices work as natural COX-2 inhibitors, reducing pain and inflammation, says Dr. Horwitz. To try turmeric in supplement form, take 300 to 500 mg of an extract standardized to 90 to 95 percent curcuminoids up to three times a day. Supplemental turmeric may thin the blood, so be cautious with anticoagulant drugs.

5 Sample alternatives. Natural ways to tackle pain include massage, movement therapies such as the Alexander Technique and Feldenkrais Method, and acupuncture, to name a few. Some chronic pain sufferers find relief with percutaneous electrical nerve stimulation (PENS), in which a practitioner sends an electric current through acupuncture needles. This sensory input may quiet pain signals.

6 Don't forgo pain meds. A well-chosen combination of medications can relieve your pain to a point that allows you to engage in daily activities and exercise, both valuable steps in healing your body and mind. Make sure your doctor has the patience to test multiple drugs until you find the right ones for you. Speak up if a medication isn't relieving your pain adequately or if you're experiencing difficult side effects. New versions of traditional drugs such as opioids are less likely to cause side effects, but I'm still concerned about their effect on mental function and energy level as well as their risks for people with a history of addiction. Ideally, natural approaches will reduce your need for medications.

7 Address pain quickly. Chronic pain patients often suffer for years before seeking help, and that's unfortunate. Dr. Dillard says that a person who's been suffering for six months usually finds faster relief than the person suffering for six years: "There's oceans of fallout from being in pain for that length of time." Living with chronic pain can trigger anxiety and depression, which can intensify your experience of the pain. A mental-health professional can help you break this cycle. Dr. Dillard adds that even if you've suffered for years, "there are always other things that can be done." 

Ask Dr. Weil Snoring; Kelp; Breast Implants; and More

I snore. Any suggestions?

You're not alone: Snoring affects over 30 percent of adults, men more than women. It occurs when tissues at the back of the mouth relax and narrow the breathing passageway. These tissues strike against each other, and air flowing through creates the tell-tale buzzing noise. To reduce snoring, I suggest losing excess weight, avoiding alcohol before bed, and limiting use of sedatives. Try sleeping on your side or raising your head with pillows; both may prevent the tissues from rubbing against each other. Or experiment with nasal strips that help open up the nostrils (reducing mouth breathing, a risk factor for snoring) or try sound-sensitive wrist devices that rouse you if you begin to snore, signaling the need to change sleep position. Get proper treatment for nasal allergies or chronic sinusitis, which can prompt snoring in some people. If heavy snoring is accompanied by symptoms like daytime drowsiness and morning headaches, see your doctor to make sure you don't have sleep apnea.

Is it safe to take GABA for anxiety?

It's safe, but it wouldn't be my first choice as a supplement for easing anxiety. GABA (gamma-aminobutyric acid) is an amino acid that's naturally produced in the brain, where it acts as a sedative neurotransmitter. Low levels of it have been linked to anxiety, so some alternative practitioners recommend taking GABA in pill or powder form to treat this mental health concern. Unfortunately, little evidence suggests that supplemental GABA will actually reach the brain and reduce anxiety. If the supplement is helping you, I see no reason to stop. A typical dose is 250 mg three times a day on an empty stomach.

A better way to increase GABA may be to take up yoga. In a recent study, researchers used brain-imaging technology to compare GABA levels in participants before and after practicing yoga for an hour. They found a 27 percent post-practice spike in the brain

chemical (*Journal of Alternative and Complementary Medicine*, May 2007).

Kava and valerian are my top supplement choices for anxiety. The June 2007 issue has more on these herbs.

I need thyroid medication, so I take a kelp tablet. Is this a good idea?

I don't recommend taking kelp in addition to or instead of thyroid medication. Some alternative practitioners advise taking this seaweed supplement, which has high levels of iodine (a trace mineral needed to make the thyroid hormones T3 and T4). Iodine deficiency can cause hypothyroidism, but unless you're on a restrictive diet, you can get enough iodine from foods such as ocean fish, yogurt, cow's milk, and iodized salt. Eating a lot of kelp or taking it in supplement form can overload the body with iodine, causing or aggravating thyroid problems. So avoid kelp supplements and stick with a standard thyroid medication, such as Thyrolar, which contains T3 and T4 hormones.

If I don't use iodized salt, where can I get iodine in my diet?

The iodine content of foods varies, but produce grown in iodine-rich soils and seafood are excellent sources. As mentioned above, iodine helps the body synthesize thyroid hormones, and deficiency can lead to various disorders and developmental concerns. Since the introduction of iodized salt in the 1920s and its use in food production, iodine deficiency is now uncommon in the United States. If you are not using it, I suggest eating a wholesome diet that includes omega-3-rich fish (salmon, sardines, or mackerel) and seaweed (nori, kelp, or wakame). Also, you might choose produce grown in iodine-rich soil—typically in coastal states. If these dietary changes aren't possible, I'd consider reintroducing iodized salt—it's harmless for most people in small amounts, and less than one half-teaspoon daily can provide the recommended intake of 150 micrograms of iodine daily.

My ankles crack when I get out of bed and my spine makes a cracking noise during crunches. Why is this?

The exact cause of joint cracking isn't known, but it's usually of no medical significance. There are a few possible reasons for the spontaneous cracking noises that most often occur in the knuckles, knees, ankles, back, or neck. The synovial fluid that lubricates joints contains gases that may form bubbles when the joint moves, and the "popping" of a bubble may account for most cracking sounds. Other cracks may come from tendons snapping against other tissues when they shift position. Arthritic joints may be "noisier" because loss of smooth cartilage leaves joint surfaces rough. If cracking is accompanied by pain, see your doctor—there could be structural problems in the joint, such as loose cartilage or torn ligaments.

Are saline breast implants safe?

Yes, saline implants are generally considered safe for breast augmentation and reconstructive surgery. Both saline and silicone implants have a silicone rubber outer shell, but saline implants are filled with sterile salt water rather than silicone gel. In the event of a leak or rupture, saline is not believed to cause any adverse health effects. But with either type of implant, there's still a risk of surgical complications such as infection, tissue hardening, and loss of feeling in the nipple or breast tissue.

In the early 1990s, reports linking silicone gel implants to autoimmune disease and cancer led the FDA to ban them. Since then, researchers have found insufficient evidence to connect silicone implants with any disease and the FDA lifted the ban in 2006.

In general, I'm not a fan of breast augmentation unless it's medically necessary. I suggest learning to accept your body the way it is. 

Please send your health questions and comments to Ask Dr. Weil, Self Healing, 42 Pleasant St., Watertown MA 02472.

Alli. This half-strength version of the prescription weight-loss drug Xenical (orlistat) debuted in mid-June with much marketing fanfare. Pronounced *AL-eye* and sold over the counter, it's meant to be part of a comprehensive weight-loss program that includes a low-fat diet, regular exercise, and behavioral changes. Alli is said to work by blocking about 25 percent of the body's fat absorption. But the drug may also block the uptake of fat-soluble vitamins, a reason you're encouraged to take a daily multivitamin.

Alli can have unpleasant gastrointestinal side effects. "The drug forces people to eat a lower fat diet—or suffer the consequences of abdominal pain, bloating, and greasy stools, sometimes with fecal soiling and leakage," says James Nicolai, MD, who runs the physician-supervised weight-loss program at the Franciscan Center for Integrative Health in Indianapolis. And if that's not a turnoff, then consider that taking Alli, at roughly \$2 a day, doesn't result in dramatic dips on the scale. According to its packaging, instead of shedding 5 pounds through dieting, you may lose another 2 or 3 pounds more with Alli when you follow its weight-control plan. (Trials of Xenical

suggest people lose 5 to 10 pounds in six months on the drug.)

MY TAKE ▶ Neither Alli nor Xenical is the answer to weight loss, and the drug has significant side effects even at half the prescription potency. Skip the diet pills, but do follow the advice of eating less and exercising more, two valuable allies for shedding pounds.

Vibration fitness machines. With names like the Power Plate, the SoloFlex Platform, and VibraFlex and with celebrity enthusiasts including Diddy and Madonna, whole-body vibration (WBV) machines are shaking up the fitness industry. Unlike the jiggling belts that once supposedly whittled waistlines, these devices typically feature a vibrating platform. By standing on it and doing resistance exercises, lifting weights, or stretching, you add punch to your workout, at least in theory. The vibrations are said to tone muscle, increase circulation, improve strength, and build bone faster than doing the same moves on solid ground, because they make your muscles work harder by forcing them to expand and contract 30 to 50 times a second.

A big selling point of WBV is that it purportedly cuts your workout time

by 50 to 60 percent since each exercise is done in shorter bursts (30 seconds for novices). While you'll certainly sweat, it's not an aerobic activity. Vibration technology was first used with Russian cosmonauts in the 1970s to prevent loss of muscle tone and bone density during space travel. In medical settings, it's used to rehabilitate sports injuries and other painful conditions, yet the research on its fitness benefits is skimpy at best.

MY TAKE ▶ I asked my trainer, Dan Bornstein, about WBV machines. He tells me they're viable pieces of training equipment, but at \$295 to \$3,500 can be expensive for home use. Less costly fitness tools such as Bodyblades or physioballs can give you similar results. He also warns that WBV needs to be used in conjunction with cardiovascular conditioning because "the machine won't do everything for you."

Sun-protection pills. If you often forget to put on sunscreen or don't like the way it feels or smells, the idea of swallowing a pill instead may sound appealing. But oral supplements that claim to help shield the skin from the sun's ultraviolet rays, or minimize cell damage if you get burned, have limited science behind them. Manufacturers suggest the pills—which typically contain a mix of antioxidants and cost about \$1 each—work from the inside out to fend off free-radical damage to the skin, but more research is needed to support these claims.

MY TAKE ▶ I think these products are gimmicky; I wouldn't count on them for sun protection. All are meant to be used in addition to—not as a replacement for—sunscreen and protective clothing, so why not spend your money on these more proven ways to safeguard your skin? **SP**

Good for You!

Cinnamon Smoothie: Drink to Your Health

Enhance your health year-round with a spice often used in holiday baking. Consuming just one half-teaspoon of cinnamon daily may help control blood sugar by making insulin more efficient. If you have insulin resistance, metabolic syndrome, or type 2 diabetes, add a teaspoon a day to your meals.

It's also good for treating nausea and diarrhea: For an upset stomach, add one half-teaspoon cinnamon to tea or applesauce, suggests Tieraona Low Dog, MD, director of botanical education at the Program in Integrative Medicine.

Enjoy a refreshing cinnamon-spiked smoothie by blending these ingredients:

- 1 cup frozen peaches
- ¼ cup plain yogurt
- ½ cup soy milk
- ½ teaspoon ground cinnamon

Source: Presentation by Tieraona Low Dog, MD, at the 4th Annual Nutrition and Health Conference in San Diego, California

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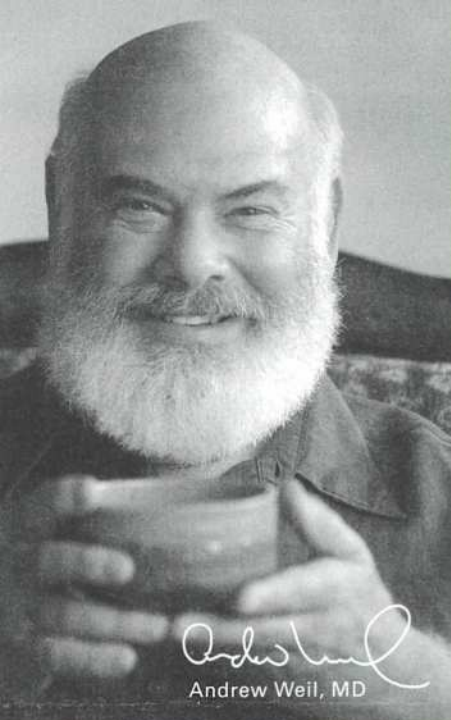
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Dr. Andrew Weil's

OCTOBER 2007

self healing

CREATING OPTIMUM HEALTH FOR YOUR BODY AND SOUL

GOOD NEWS FOR GOOD HEALTH

- Choose **blue-corn** over white-corn tortilla chips. They have less starch, a lower glycemic load, and 20 percent more protein, points out a recent study.
- **Yoga** may help keep your high blood pressure under control without medication. A review of randomized trials found the mind-body method significantly reduced both systolic and diastolic blood pressure.
- A **Mediterranean** diet rich in fruits, vegetables, whole grains, olive oil, and fresh fish can both reduce the risk of Alzheimer's disease and slow the disorder's progression in those already diagnosed with it.
- Choose a **walkable** place to live with help from *walkscore.com*. Enter any street address to find the location's "walk score," ranging from 100 (a walker's paradise) to 0 (driving only).
- Compounds in Asian **pumpkins** may one day replace or reduce daily insulin injections for people with diabetes, according to preliminary research from China.

Best Lessons from Wellness Centers

Visiting a wellness center or spa can spark or reinspire your commitment to a healthy lifestyle. But if you can't get to one, here are a few techniques from experts so that you can create a do-it-yourself recharge at home.

Refresh your skin. Getting a facial or other skin treatment at a spa means sitting back, letting a professional take over, and allowing your mind to explore new sensations, says Karen Koffler, MD, medical director at Canyon Ranch Living in Miami. For a spa-like experience at home, grab a friend or spouse and give each other a facial treatment. "Both men and women love facials, and it's a very intimate thing to do with a partner," explains Dr. Koffler.

Try this ayurvedic scrub from the book *Spa Living* by Sunamita Lim (Gibbs Smith, 2007). The ingredients can be found at health food stores. The scrub consists of one part rice-bran powder, one part chickpea powder, and one quarter part each of hibiscus, rose, sandalwood, and coriander powders. Mix the ingredients together. Take a small amount, add a few drops of water, then apply it in a circular motion to the face and neck. When you're ready, rinse it off with warm water.

Walk to reconnect. "People are so busy that they often don't have time to enjoy the outdoors and allow exercise to be fun," says Mary Horn, director of nutrition and exercise science at Miraval Life in Balance resort in Catalina, Arizona. She suggests incorporating exercises that improve daily muscle function—lunges, squats, or push-ups against a wall, tree, or bench—into a walk that allows you to enjoy the moment and connect to your surroundings.

Practice mindful eating. At Miraval, guests are taught to eat consciously by choosing foods that engage the senses and by taking

the time to savor the taste, appreciate the nutritional value, and envision the food's origin. "In our hustle-and-bustle world, people desktop-dine and dashboard-dine," says Horn. "Eating mindfully will help you enjoy your food and avoid consuming unnecessary calories." Horn suggests using your utensil as a reminder to slow down and breathe. She recommends eating in silence for the first few minutes and setting the fork or spoon down after every bite while breathing in and out to enjoy the sensory satisfaction of what you're eating.

Broaden your awareness. One of Canyon Ranch's up-and-coming classes is a technique called Big Mind, explained in the new book *Big Mind/Big Heart: Finding Your Way* by Dennis Genpo Merzel (Big Mind, 2007). A fusion of Western psychology and Eastern wisdom, its central thesis is that there are many voices in the mind competing to be heard, which allows them to surface at inappropriate times. Big Mind exercises consist of "talking" with these voices about their benefits, disadvantages, and roles. "By bringing each state into full consciousness," says Dr. Koffler, "people learn to understand and appreciate themselves more fully and can choose new patterns of behaviors." Visit genpo.org for more about the Big Mind technique.

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HEALTH IN THE NEWS

Grace Under Pressure May Increase Good Cholesterol

Men who handle stressful situations better may have higher levels of HDL ("good") cholesterol than men who are more hostile. In a study of more than 700 men (average age: 65) who received cholesterol tests and responded to questionnaires about coping strategies, University of Hawaii researchers found that those with high hostility levels were more likely to perceive problems as stressful and react with negative behavior. These men also had lower HDL levels than men who coped better with problems and made a plan to tackle them. Scientists were surprised to find that managing stress better didn't appear to lower LDL ("bad") cholesterol.

MY TAKE ► Although it's hard to know the mechanism that links reduced stress levels with better cholesterol levels, this study adds to the growing evidence that cardiovascular health involves mental and emotional factors, not just physical ones.

Once-a-Year Osteoporosis Drug Approved

The FDA gave the green light in late August to a prescription drug, Reclast, that makes treatment for postmenopausal bone loss available in an annual 15-minute intravenous dose. Reclast belongs to the same bisphosphonate class of drugs as Fosamax, Actonel, and Boniva, which are typically taken orally. In clinical trials, women with osteoporosis who took Reclast lessened their odds of spinal fractures by 70 percent and hip fractures by 40 percent over three years compared to those taking a placebo (oral forms tend to reduce spinal fractures by 40 to 50 percent). The most common side effects of Reclast were fever, muscle pain, or headache, but an abnormal heart rhythm was observed in a small percentage of women.

MY TAKE ► Although no medication for osteoporosis is benign, I would be wary of a new agent like this until it develops a good track record for safety and effectiveness.

Why Green Tea Helps Prevent Cancer

One way that green tea may reduce cancer risk is by boosting production of the body's own detoxification enzymes, which can convert carcinogens to nontoxic chemicals. Researchers asked 42 healthy adults to take capsules providing 800 mg a day of the green-tea compound EGCG, about what you'd get from drinking eight to 16 cups of the tea. After four weeks, levels of key detoxification enzymes rose by as much as 80 percent in some participants. (*Cancer Epidemiology, Biomarkers & Prevention*, August 2007)

MY TAKE ► Here's yet another mechanism that may explain green tea's benefits. But you don't need to drink eight cups: A recent Japanese study found reduced mortality from all causes in green-tea drinkers who consumed about half that amount.

A Product Warning for Red Yeast Rice

In August, the FDA warned consumers not to take three cholesterol-lowering products: Red Yeast Rice and Red Yeast Rice/Policosanol Complex, both from Swanson Healthcare Products, and Cholestrix from Sunburst Biorganics. An FDA inquiry suggests the products contain added lovastatin, a naturally occurring compound in red yeast rice and, at high levels, the active ingredient in Mevacor, a prescription drug for high cholesterol. The FDA said these red yeast rice products are a threat because lovastatin may cause muscle problems leading to kidney impairment.

MY TAKE ► The problem lies with products that may have added lovastatin, which would make them drugs rather than supplements. I recommend red yeast rice supplements as a natural alternative to statin drugs because of their effectiveness and lower incidence of side effects, including muscle problems.

Behind the Headlines: The Echinacea Flip-Flop

A recent report revealed that echinacea could help prevent and short-circuit a cold. This followed research in a 2005 issue of the *New England Journal of Medicine* that cast doubt on the herb's effectiveness. What's responsible for this flip-flop and which evidence should you believe?

The latest positive findings, published in the July issue of *Lancet Infectious Diseases*, come from a meta-analysis, which I felt used better studies—randomized, controlled trials—of the herb to draw its statistical conclusions. Pooling data from 14 studies of some 1,600 people, it found that taking echinacea reduced the odds of catching a cold by 58 percent and trimmed nearly a day and a half off its length. I think the main reasons that previous studies may have found the daisy-family derivative lacking is they failed to standardize the species, part of the plant used, or method of extracting it; tested a dosage too low to show benefits; or looked at only one kind of cold-causing virus.

Throughout echinacea's ups and downs in the research, I believe that many consumers have remained confident in its cold-fighting abilities. While this certainly isn't the last word on the herb (long-term investigations are needed), I'll still turn to products made with *Echinacea purpurea* to ease my symptoms and nip a cold in the bud. But I'll use the remedy along with other natural cold-stopping strategies, including eating more garlic, washing my hands more frequently, and taking immune-boosting remedies such as andrographis and astragalus.



Andrew Weil, MD

Cold Hard Facts

- More than 200 kinds of viruses can cause the common cold.
- Sales of echinacea in this country represent roughly 10 percent of the dietary supplement market, with more than 800 products on shelves containing some form of the herb.

EATING WELL

All the Facts on Flavonoids

One reason fruits and vegetables are good for you is that they're chock full of flavonoids, one of the most important categories of phytonutrients. Studies are beginning to show flavonoids' benefits in a big way: So far, they've been linked to reduced risks of heart disease, Alzheimer's disease, and cancer. I get plenty of these compounds from tea, vegetables, berries and other fruits, and dark chocolate, and I encourage you to do the same.

What they are. Flavonoids are divided into six types (see chart). Anthocyanins—the red, blue, and purple pigments in berries—have powerful cancer-protective effects. Some of the best-studied flavonoids are EGCG in green tea, the soy isoflavone genistein, and quercetin, found in apples and onions.

How they work. Flavonoids are strong antioxidants in test tubes, but their antioxidant activity in the body is weaker. Recent research suggests they may work instead by influencing gene expression and cell signaling pathways, both of which play a role in cancer and heart disease.

Who may benefit. Studies suggest dietary flavonoids can help ward off many age-related disorders.

Heart disease. When researchers analyzed dietary questionnaires from 34,489 postmenopausal women, two types of flavonoids—flavanones and anthocyanins—were associated with a reduced risk of death from coronary heart disease (*American Journal of Clinical Nutrition*, March 2007).

Cancer. In one study of almost 3,000 women, a diet rich in flavonoids cut the risk of breast cancer in postmenopausal women by about 35 percent (*American Journal of Epidemiology*, March 1, 2007). Research also shows that women whose diets

contain the most kaempferol, a flavonol compound found in broccoli and tea, have a 40 percent lower risk of ovarian cancer.

Memory problems. A study of 1,640 seniors found that those with the highest flavonoid intakes experienced less cognitive decline over a 10-year period (*American Journal of Epidemiology*, June 15, 2007). Other studies have linked intake of flavonols and flavones to a reduced risk of age-related dementia.

How to maximize the benefits. Opt for organic produce, which some reports suggest has higher levels of flavonoids than conventional-grown varieties. And steam your vegetables rather than boil them to retain more of these healthful substances. **SP**

FLAVONOID TYPE FOOD SOURCES

Anthocyanins	Black, blue, & red berries, red & purple grapes, red wine
Flavanols	Green tea, chocolate, apples, apricots, red grapes, red wine
Flavanones	Citrus fruits and juices, e.g., oranges, grapefruits, lemons
Flavonols	Onions, kale, leeks, broccoli, apples, blueberries, cranberries
Flavones	Parsley, thyme, celery, hot peppers
Isoflavones	Soybeans, soy foods, legumes

Sources: Linus Pauling Institute; Jeffrey Blumberg, PhD

8 Myths about Breast Cancer

Most women now know that underwire bras and antiperspirants *don't* cause breast cancer, but there are many more rumors circulating about breast cancer and creating widespread confusion. Here are eight common misconceptions about the disease and some truths about them that may surprise you.

MYTH: *Most women who get breast cancer have numerous risk factors.*

The majority of breast-cancer patients have no identifiable risk factors, and only about 30 percent of them have a family history of the disease. Approximately 80 percent of breast-cancer cases occur in women over age 50. In fact, age is a more important risk factor than race, ages of onset of menstruation and menopause, and age of first pregnancy.

MYTH: *Only the mother's family history of breast cancer affects a woman's risk.*

Half of genetic breast cancers in women are inherited from a woman's father, not her mother, suggests new research (*Journal of the American Medical Association*, June 20, 2007). But unless her father has female relatives with breast cancer, the faulty gene may be passed down unnoticed.

MYTH: *Women who have the BRCA-1 or -2 gene mutations will eventually get breast cancer and are more likely to die from the disease.*

Mutations of certain genes, such as BRCA-1 and -2, increase the lifetime risk of breast cancer, but that doesn't mean the disease itself will develop. And according to a recent report, women with or without the best-known breast-cancer genes had virtually the same overall survival rate 10 years after being diagnosed (*New England Journal of Medicine*, July 12, 2007). If you have a family history of breast cancer or a genetic predisposition to the disease, you may want to consider getting tested for genetic mutations so you can begin cancer screenings early and take preventive action.

MYTH: *Experts agree that every woman over age 40 should get an annual mammogram.*

There is a lack of consensus about when women should start getting an annual mammogram. Earlier this year, the American College of Physicians issued new guidelines suggesting that women in their 40s speak with their doctors about individual risk and then decide whether or not to get a mammogram before 50. The American Cancer Society advises that women begin mammograms at 40.

The problem, say experts, is that about 80 percent of women have dense breasts before menopause (compared to 45 percent of women in their fifties, when menopause typically occurs). On a mammogram this dense tissue shows up white, just like cancer. Fatty tissue appears gray. "If your breasts are less dense and more fatty, mammography is a great tool, but if your breasts are more dense, you may get false positives, which can lead to unnecessary tests and

anxiety," says Victoria Maizes, MD, executive director of the Program in Integrative Medicine at the University of Arizona. She recommends women discuss yearly mammograms with their doctor beginning at age 40. The only sure way a woman can tell if her breasts are dense is to get a mammogram.

MYTH: *Radiation from mammography causes cancer.*

Any radiation exposure will increase your risk of cancer in general, but the amount used in a mammogram is relatively small; the dose is about what you'd get from naturally occurring radiation over three months. One study that looked at women with the BRCA-1 or -2 gene who began getting mammograms at an early age found no relationship between mammography and breast-cancer risk.

Mammograms are still the best screening tool for breast cancer, so I would look at your overall exposure to radiation and cut back elsewhere, if you feel it's necessary. Calculate your radiation risk at epa.gov/radiation/students/calculate.html.

To learn more about managing your exposure to pollutants, including 216 chemicals linked to breast cancer and found in everything from household products to fried food, visit <http://sciencereview.silent.spring.org> for a database created this year by the Silent Spring Institute.

MYTH: *Hormone replacement therapy (HRT) causes breast cancer.*

Hormone replacement therapy hasn't been shown to *cause* breast cancer directly, but it has been linked to an increase in lifetime risk. The Women's Health Initiative study found that taking estrogen and progestin for more than four years increased a woman's risk of breast cancer, so before deciding on any form of hormone therapy, consider its risks. One popular alternative to HRT is bioidentical hormones, which are made from the same starting materials as many pharmaceutical treatments but are designed to be chemically identical to what a woman's body would make naturally. There is not yet proof that bioidenticals are any safer than other hormone therapies, but some women prefer them because they have fewer side effects. With any hormone product (natural, synthetic, or bioidentical), I recommend women stop using it every three to six months to see if menopausal symptoms persist and treatment needs to be continued. Be prepared for a short-term increase in symptoms until the body adjusts to the change.

MYTH: *Once a tumor has formed, it spreads rapidly.*

How fast a tumor grows is measured by how fast it doubles in size. Doubling time varies greatly, says Dr. Maizes. "If a tumor is growing at an accelerated pace, it can double within months; slow-growing tumors could take years to double."

If you're diagnosed with breast cancer, action is needed, but so is time to decide which treatment is right for you. Since it's hard to gauge how fast a tumor will grow, don't wait too long. I agree with Dr. Maizes that two to three weeks is a reasonable amount of time to make a decision.

MYTH: *Body weight plays no role in breast-cancer risk or survival at any age.*

Although the data appear mixed, there is evidence that extra weight may be protective earlier in life but may increase a woman's risk as she gets older, says Judith Boyce, MD, an integrative family practitioner in Vancouver, Canada, who has counseled numerous breast-cancer patients. "It all boils down to estrogen," she says. "Before menopause, women produce estrogen in their ovaries; afterward, it's produced and

stored in body fat, which can increase your estrogen levels and thereby increase your risk of developing breast cancer."

Women undergoing treatment for breast cancer may need to be particularly attentive to their weight. "Women overweight at the time of diagnosis or soon afterward have a poorer survival rate," says Dr. Boyce, adding that women typically gain weight during breast-cancer treatment from corticosteroid therapy. Unless you're underweight, pay attention to diet and exercise to maintain a healthy weight. 

HEALTHY LIVING

Happier Feet: A Health Guide to Shoes

I am no Imelda Marcos when it comes to my shoe collection—I tend to look for comfort and fit over style and appearance. I wear comfortable shoes when I lecture, sandals when I'm at home, and light hiking boots when I'm walking through the desert. To help sort out the healthiest shoes for your feet, I've asked Illinois-based podiatrist Marlene Reid, DPM, for her opinions. For more on footwear and your health, visit apma.org.

SHOE	PROS	CONS	ADVICE
High heels	• Make you look taller and legs appear longer • Calves seem more defined as muscles shorten and tighten	• Two-inch heels change your gait, increasing force on the inner knee and your odds for tendon problems • Three-inch heels put seven times the pressure on the balls of feet and toes, increasing the odds of pinched nerves and metatarsal pain • Higher heels shorten the tendon, perhaps causing heel pain and altering balance • Narrow or tight shoes push big toes inward, causing bunions, or bend smaller toes, causing hammertoes	• Vary heel heights on alternate days • Chunky heels are easier on feet than skinny ones; "kitten" heels are a good compromise • Orthotics can reduce pressure on balls of feet and toes
Flats (women)	• Not heels	• Often no arch support • Ballet flats have thin soles with poor cushioning and foot support	• Pick well-made shoes with a firm heel cup and an arch • Don't buy if you can twist the sole in half
Lace-up shoes	• Offer more stability and a firmer heel cup • Often well-made	• Laces can hit feet with a high arch in a bad spot • Shoes can be narrow • Require more work than slip-ons	• Select styles with firm heel cups
Slip-ons or loafers	• Reliable and dependable • Softer styles may have more give than lace-ups	• Deck shoes have no heel-cup support or firmness • Depending on the cut, may rub foot	• Choose styles with round and deep toe box and firm heel cups • Best ones are not too flexible or stiff
Flip-flops	• Fine for short periods as basic protection at the beach, pool, or public showers	• "Worse than walking barefoot," says Dr. Reid • Flimsy construction with no arch support or shock absorption and little cushioning • Feet slip and slap, toes stub or get irritated from gripping, arches ache, ankles twist	• Sports sandals with ankle straps or aqua shoes are better and less apt to slip off • Avoid if have heel pain; put sunscreen on exposed feet

Eat Well, Spend Less

Quality food may seem expensive, but you don't have to wait for sales, buy store brands, and clip coupons to afford it. I asked Sandra Gluck, food editor at *Everyday Food* and *Body + Soul* magazines; Wendy Kohatsu, MD, an integrative physician and culinary student; and Marion Nestle, PhD, MPH, nutritionist and author of *What to Eat* (North Point Press, 2006), for their suggestions to help maximize nutrition—and extend your food dollar.

How to Shop the Supermarket

Stick to the perimeter. Supermarkets keep fresh foods and perishables along the edges of the store and processed foods in the center aisles. Processed foods are almost always more expensive (compare the cost of potatoes, carrots, or spinach to a bag of vegetable chips, or of rolled oats to boxed cereal).

Reduce animal protein, except fish. Meat and dairy are among the most expensive items you'll put in your cart, so eating even one or two plant-based meals a day instead will save you money. Adopt Asian or Mediterranean eating habits, which emphasize fresh produce and whole grains. Instead of planning meals around meat, think of it more as a condiment or flavoring agent, or sneak in substitutes. Bulgur wheat has a "mouthfeel" similar to ground meat; use it to partially or completely replace the meat in chili or other meat-based dishes. Textured vegetable protein, or TVP, is another inexpensive substitute.

Pack in produce. A USDA study found that, on average, seven servings of fruits and vegetables cost less than \$1 per day. What's more, fresh is usually cheaper than frozen or canned when you consider the cost per serving. Stock up on inexpensive basics like carrots (expand your recipe

repertoire; instead of boiled carrots, try carrot-raisin slaw). Balance cost against convenience when it comes to items like pre-cut vegetables, shredded cheese, or bagged salads. And plan in advance how you'll use leftovers to reduce waste. Also consider growing some produce. Lack the space? No green thumb? Most herbs thrive all year in a sunny window.

Fresh, frozen, or canned? In general, I recommend buying fresh foods whenever possible. Nutritionally, frozen is almost as good (and sometimes better, if the food is out of season), although you'll sacrifice some flavor and texture with many frozen vegetables. I usually avoid most canned goods except beans, tomato products, water-packed fish, and soup. When buying frozen or canned foods, look for the shortest ingredient list to avoid additives like salt.

Prioritize organics. If you can't afford to always buy organic, focus on the foods you eat most often. For example, if you drink lots of milk, you may want to spend more for organic. The nonprofit Environmental Working Group (ewg.org) regularly updates a list of the "dirty dozen" most pesticide-laden fruits and vegetables, which I also recommend buying organic. The current list, starting with the most contaminated, includes peaches, apples, nectarines, sweet bell peppers, celery, strawberries, cherries, lettuce, grapes (imported), pears, spinach, and potatoes.

Buy in bulk. This is a good general strategy, but because buying in bulk isn't always cheaper, check the cost per serving. You might even bring a calculator and notebook so you can compare which store has the best deals on certain items. Stock up on staples like rice, pastas, legumes (canned or dried), grains, nuts, and flaxseed. You can also buy large quantities of fresh, in-season produce (such as blueberries, strawberries, and cherries) and freeze them for use later in the year. Tomatoes can also be frozen whole.

Freeze more. Proper storage helps prevent spoilage. Label and date everything that's not in its original package. Meat, poultry, and fish should be well wrapped in individual portions and stored in zip-top bags or other freezer-safe containers. Nuts and flaxseed go rancid quickly; extend their life by freezing them. Grains can also be frozen. Spread berries and cherries in a single layer on a baking sheet; once they're frozen, store in a zip-top bag.

Cook once, use twice. Plan meals with foods that can do double- or triple-duty. If you buy a head of broccoli for pasta primavera one night, save the stalks and a few florets; the next day, cook the stalks in vegetable broth until they're soft and purée them to make a creamy base for broccoli soup. Use leftover bread for croutons, bread crumbs, or bread pudding.

Get creative with leftovers. Waste is expensive; create less of it by using extra vegetables in dishes like soups, frittatas, ratatouille, sauces, stir-fries, and homemade vegetable stock, or steam or sauté vegetables and freeze them. Freeze big batches of soups, sauces, and stocks in individual portions or ice-cube trays for use later. Freeze leftover herbs in ice-cube trays with olive oil or water, or dry them. If all else fails, compost. **SP**

Biggest Bang for Your Buck

Stretch your food dollars with these economical sources of key nutrients.

Antioxidants

- Red kidney beans or pinto beans
- Berries (frozen, if not in season)
- Prunes
- Fuji, Gala, or Granny Smith apples
- Sweet cherries (frozen, if not in season)

Fiber

- Legumes (beans, lentils, peas, etc.)
- Asian pears
- Bulgur wheat
- Spinach
- Pearled barley

Monounsaturated fats

- Tree nuts
- Extra-virgin olive oil
- Sunflower, pumpkin, or squash seeds
- Avocados

Omega-3s

- Canned sockeye salmon
- Canned sardines
- Flaxseed (grind just before use)
- Walnuts

Protein

- Low- or no-fat cottage cheese
- Canned light tuna or sardines
- Beans, including edamame
- Quinoa grain
- Tofu and soy milk

Ask Dr. Weil Raw Milk Cheese; Altitude Sickness; & More

Are there any health risks associated with unpasteurized cheese?

I see no reason to avoid cheese made from unpasteurized or raw milk unless you are pregnant or have a weakened immune system. Although pasteurization uses heat to destroy bacteria without significantly changing milk's nutritional value, I often find that pasteurized cheese lacks flavor and prefer varieties made from raw milks. It's true that raw milk may harbor bacteria such as campylobacter, listeria, and salmonella, all of which can survive the cheese-making process, but reports of actual illness are infrequent around the world.

In general, cheese made from raw milk should be aged for a minimum of 60 days. Many hard cheeses, including Parmigiano-Reggiano and some Vermont cheddar, are made from raw milk and have an excellent safety record. Soft cheeses, such as unpasteurized Brie and Camembert, pose a slightly greater health risk because of their higher moisture content, which can promote the growth of bacteria.

Do you have any helpful hints for altitude sickness?

A common malady of mountain climbers, hikers, and skiers, altitude sickness is caused by reduced air pressure and a lower concentration of oxygen at higher elevations. It's often the result of climbing too high too fast. To prevent the headache, nausea, dizziness, fatigue, and shortness of breath typical of this condition, ascend gradually, consume plenty of water and carbohydrates along the way, and sleep at an altitude lower than you will be climbing. When I hike or travel to higher altitudes, I've found that supplementing with Coenzyme Q10, which improves the use of oxygen at the cellular level, can also be helpful. Take at least 100 mg a day two weeks before reaching higher levels and during your visit. To ward off altitude sickness, a favorite remedy of indigenous peoples in the Andes is chewing on the leaves of the coca plant.

What is your opinion of the new sweetener Zsweet?

This natural, calorie-free sweetener appears safe, and I think it's a better substitute for baking or flavoring than sucralose (Splenda) and other artificial sweeteners, which I don't recommend using. Zsweet is a blend of erythritol (a sugar alcohol found in many fruits and fermented foods like soy sauce, cheese, and wine) and other fruit extracts. The crystalline white powder is about 70 percent as sweet as sugar, and lacks the bitter aftertaste of some artificial sweeteners. Unlike table sugar, Zsweet is considered safe for teeth by the FDA and, unlike many artificial sweeteners, is unlikely to cause gas or cramps. It has no effect on blood sugar, so it's also safe for diabetics. You can find Zsweet at natural food stores. (For information on other natural sweeteners such as stevia and tagatose, see the June 2006 issue.)

What foods should I avoid during chemotherapy and radiation?

There aren't any foods you should avoid, but people being treated for cancer should aim for a nourishing diet with plenty of fresh fruits and vegetables, whole grains, and omega-3 fatty acids. (The levels of antioxidants in produce shouldn't interfere with chemotherapy drugs or radiation, but the higher concentrations in antioxidant supplements might, so I would skip taking them during treatment.) Spicy or greasy foods may intensify common side effects of radiation and chemotherapy, such as nausea. On the other hand, certain foods may ease treatment side effects, such as whole grains for constipation and ginger for nausea. Visit the American Institute for Cancer Research (aicr.org) for useful dietary tips on specific cancers.

Is the ayurvedic herb amla safe?

Also known as amalaki, this tart, cherry-size fruit (*Emblica officinalis*) native to India is rich in both vitamin C and antioxidant polyphenols,

and it's fine to supplement with it on a daily basis to enhance immunity and heart health. David Winston, an ethnobotanist, herbalist, and coauthor of *Adaptogens* (Healing Arts Press, 2007), says amla helps stabilize blood vessels, lowers cholesterol, and improves cardiac tone. Take 500 to 1,000 mg per day in tablet or capsule form. This herb doesn't interact with aspirin.

Amla also acts as a mild laxative and is one of three fruits that comprise triphala, an ayurvedic bowel regulator that I recommend for chronic constipation (follow package directions). Amla is also the main ingredient in chyavanprash, a sweet, tangy paste used in India as an invigorating daily tonic to spread on toast or crackers. Find it online or at Indian groceries.

What do you think of ozone therapy both for general well-being and as an adjunct cancer treatment?

There's no reason to expose yourself to this toxic gas (a highly reactive form of oxygen), whether as an adjunct cancer treatment or even via ozone generators marketed as air purifiers. Offered by some alternative practitioners to treat everything from wounds to AIDS, ozone may be mixed with oxygen or liquids and applied to the skin, given under pressure into the rectum or other body cavities, or injected into the bloodstream or joints. The idea that oxygen therapy with ozone may help cancer patients comes from Otto Warburg, MD, a Nobel Prize-winning biochemist. In the 1930s, he proposed that increasing oxygen levels kills off cancer cells that thrive in a low-oxygen environment. This theory has no validity, but the claims for ozone have flourished. Rather than being helpful, there is more evidence that it may be harmful. Ozone forced into a body cavity may cause a rupture, and mixing it with blood runs the risk of transmitting viruses, reducing blood counts, and creating an embolism. **SP**

Please send your health questions to Ask Dr. Weil, Self Healing, 42 Pleasant St., Watertown MA 02472.

Brain "gyms." To exercise the minds of aging boomers, software companies, videogame makers, and websites are offering up brain calisthenics. These workouts often include math puzzles, word and name recall activities, and visual and spatial tests, aimed at beefing up concentration, jogging memory, speeding mental processing, and slowing cognitive decline. Brain exercise is all the rage in Japan, where electronic games like Nintendo's Brain Age and Sega's Brain Trainer have sold millions of copies in the world's fastest-aging nation. In the United States, computer-based mind-stimulation programs include Posit Science's Brain Fitness and SharpBrain's MindFit, as well as online subscription-based services and games such as *HappyNeuron.com* and *MyBrainTrainer.com*.

MY TAKE ▶ Good idea. Easy, interactive, and fun, these training methods seem to work well for sharpening your mind and boosting brain fitness, although scientific evidence for specific programs is limited. The *Healthy Brain Kit* that I created with UCLA memory expert Gary Small, MD, offers

yet another resource for the kinds of mental challenges that brains need to retain their functionality.

At-home lasers for skin care.

Do-it-yourself lasers now allow consumers to improve their own skin. Rather than making frequent visits to a dermatologist, they can use a hand-held laser in the privacy of their own homes to quiet acne breakouts, banish blemishes, or smooth out fine lines and wrinkles, ostensibly saving time and money. Of course, home devices may rely on low-level lasers or light therapy to stimulate healing, while a dermatologist would use a higher-powered laser to penetrate and treat deeper layers of skin. At-home acne gadgets such as ThermoClear and Zeno run about \$150 and use pulsed heat energy to zap mild flare-ups. Wrinkle-softening infrared devices might set you back \$200.

MY TAKE ▶ Bad, gimmicky idea. I'd rather see laser treatments done by professionals, especially for skin problems. These hand-held helpers may be only mildly effective at best.

Med Mark. Launched in June, this new stamp appears on selected packages of foods that comply with the Mediterranean-diet principles. Found on more than 50 grocery items, including some olives, olive oils, and pasta sauces, the stamp features a black amphora, a traditional clay jug used in Mediterranean cultures to hold foods and drinks, on an orange background along with the Med Mark name and website (*mediterraneanmark.org*). Med Mark is the brainchild of Oldways, a Boston-based food-issues think tank that has championed the diet. Its goal is to get consumers to eat more fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and other Mediterranean foods, says program manager Nicki Heverling, RD.

MY TAKE ▶ Good idea. Since I've long endorsed a traditional Mediterranean style of eating, which is similar to my anti-inflammatory diet, I support any simple, practical tool that encourages shoppers to select healthy foods.

Three-generation playgrounds.

Older adults in Finland are taking to swings, seesaws, and climbing frames at specially designed outdoor playgrounds, right alongside preschoolers and their parents. A University of Lapland study of 40 people aged 65 to 81 found improved balance, coordination, and speed after three months of playground use, and participants also felt more confident about their bodies. And in Nuremberg, Germany, officials have created a playground exclusively for the over-60 set equipped with larger chessboards, boules, as well as badminton courts with padded surfaces.

MY TAKE ▶ Good idea worth importing. Having old and young playing together is a healthy and sometimes rare thing. I'm in favor of places that encourage lifelong physical activity for people of all ages. 

Good for You!

Getting Happy: A Whole-Body Smile

- Sit comfortably, with your hands resting in your lap, your feet flat on the floor, and your eyes closed. Relax your breathing.
- Think of the playful, good-humored aspects of your true nature. Picture yourself smiling radiantly.
- Allow a half smile to form so it bathes and comforts your face.
- Imagine that this smile spreads to your neck and throat, bringing happiness along with it. Let your mind rest there.
- Let the joy spread to your lungs, sensing the comfort it brings.
- Next let the bliss fill your heart, warming and soothing it. Breathe and let your mind rest there. Let the feeling of your smile spread to your stomach and any other areas of your body you wish to focus on. Sense the happiness in each region.
- End by sensing your whole body breathing and being comforted by the soothing sensation of a smile.

Source: 10 Simple Solutions for Building Self-Esteem by Glenn R. Schiraldi, PhD (New Harbinger, 2007)

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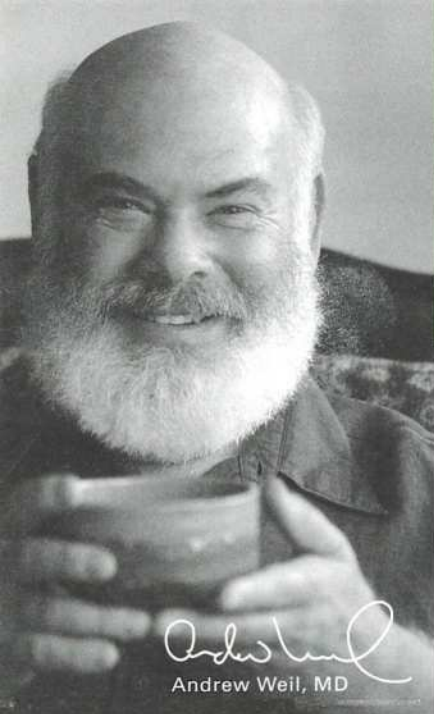
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Does Stress Age You?

SuperCentenarians

Aging Gracefully

Foods for Longevity



Andrew Weil, MD

Dr. Andrew Weil's

SPECIAL ISSUE: **Healthy Aging**

NOVEMBER 2007

self healing

CREATING OPTIMUM HEALTH FOR YOUR BODY AND SOUL

GOOD NEWS FOR GOOD HEALTH

- Freshly ground **flaxseed** may prevent hot flashes. Women who mixed 2 tablespoons into cereal, yogurt, or juice twice daily for six weeks reported a 50 percent drop in their frequency and a 57 percent decrease in the intensity of their hot-flash symptoms.
- Combining strength training on weight machines with aerobic **exercise** (such as using a treadmill or bike) can help people with type 2 diabetes to lower blood-sugar levels more than either type of activity alone.
- Count your **blessings**: Keeping a daily "gratitude" journal for just two to three weeks has been shown to increase energy, enthusiasm, and attentiveness in healthy people, and to improve mental health and general well-being in organ-transplant recipients.
- In addition to preventing urinary tract infections, **cranberries** hold promise for improving ovarian cancer treatment. In a recent test-tube study, extracts of the fruit boosted the effectiveness of chemotherapy drugs prescribed for the condition. 

The Secrets of Living to 110 or Beyond

They've been called human time capsules, living treasures, and the poster people for longevity. Supercentenarians (people aged 110 and older) are growing in number, and they're attracting attention from scientists who hope to pinpoint what accounts for their extraordinary ages. Here's what we know.

Who are the oldest? ▶ The oldest person in the world is Edna Parker, 114, of Shelbyville, Indiana, and the oldest man is Tomoji Tanabe, 112, of Miyakonojo, Japan. Both are reportedly in good health and able to walk. The oldest person on record was Jeanne Calment of France (1875–1997), who reached 122. The oldest man whose age isn't disputed was Christian Mortensen of Denmark (1882–1998), who died at 115.

How many are there? ▶ The Gerontology Research Group (grg.org) frequently updates a list of living supercentenarians whose age has been validated by a birth certificate and other documents. There are currently 78 people on the list, 71 of them women. The most-represented countries are the United States (33 people) and Japan (24), in part due to their good record-keeping. Researchers estimate that there are actually 60 to 75 American supercentenarians and 300 to 450 worldwide.

How healthy are they? ▶ Contrary to the notion that advancing age brings steadily declining health, many of the oldest old are in surprisingly good shape. A recent study of 32 US supercentenarians revealed that more than 40 percent needed only minimal assistance with daily activities or were functionally independent. Researchers also found that participants had markedly delayed or even escaped diseases normally associated with aging. Only 6 percent had a history of heart attack and 13 percent a history of stroke. Twenty-five percent had

been successfully treated for cancer, and Parkinson's disease was rare (*Journal of the American Geriatrics Society*, August 2006). To me, these findings underline the medical adage that "you're only as old as your arteries" and also show you don't have to be cancer-free to reach an advanced age.

What explains their longevity? ▶ Genetics clearly plays a role, as many extreme elders have long-lived relatives. But this group shares other qualities, according to Jerry Friedman, who traveled the globe to photograph and interview 50 supercentenarians for his book, *Earth's Elders: The Wisdom of the World's Oldest People* (Earth's Elders Foundation, 2005). They led physically active lives, and some farmed into their eighties and nineties. They tended to be optimistic, despite having endured great hardship (one woman survived the atomic bombing of Hiroshima in 1945). Many were poor, but relied on a rich network of family and friends. And many cited the importance of spirituality (a Buddhist lama earned his doctorate in theology at 106).

And a sense of humor may help. On her 120th birthday, Jeanne Calment was asked by a young journalist, "Will I see you at next year's party?" She replied, "I don't see why not; you look pretty healthy." For more biographies, visit earthselders.org. 

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HEALTH IN THE NEWS

Live Longer by Taking Vitamin D

Supplementing with vitamin D may prolong your life, report scientists who analyzed data from 18 studies of some 57,000 people. After about six years, those who took vitamin D supplements had a 7 percent lower risk of death from all causes than those who didn't. This is the first analysis to show that taking one vitamin has an impact on mortality. Daily doses ranged from 300 to 2,000 IU, with an average dose of 528 IU. (*Archives of Internal Medicine*, September 10, 2007)

MY TAKE ▶ These results offer further evidence that vitamin D is a powerful protector of health. The nutrient may reduce mortality by helping to prevent such life-threatening conditions as cancer, heart disease, and diabetes. I advise taking at least 1,000 IU of vitamin D3 (cholecalciferol) a day.

Keeping Fit Helps Women Complete Cancer Treatments

Breast-cancer patients who exercised regularly during their chemotherapy course were more likely to complete treatments on time. Before chemo began, researchers divided 242 women into three groups: One practiced strength training, a second did an aerobic workout, and a third got no exercise. Both exercise groups did an hour-long session three times a week. Seventy-eight percent of those who lifted weights and 74 percent of the aerobic exercisers completed 85 percent or more of their chemo regimen in its prescribed 17-week course compared to 66 percent in the no-activity group. Self-esteem, fitness, and body composition also improved. (*Journal of Clinical Oncology*, October 1, 2007)

MY TAKE ▶ I recommend exercise in this instance, but I'd like to know whether the active women were more likely to finish treatment on time because they had fewer side effects, a boost in mood, or enjoyed a better appetite and overall health.

Hypnosis Benefits Women Having Breast-Cancer Surgery

Hypnotherapy may ease the pain of breast-cancer surgery both during and after the procedure. Two hundred women scheduled for a breast biopsy or lumpectomy were randomly assigned to receive either 15 minutes of hypnosis (including suggestions intended to promote relaxation and reduce pain) or a chat with a psychologist shortly before surgery. The hypnotherapy group needed less anesthesia during surgery and reported less pain, nausea, fatigue, and emotional distress afterward. (*Journal of the National Cancer Institute*, September 5, 2007)

MY TAKE ▶ There's no reason not to use hypnotic suggestion to reduce complications of any surgical procedure. I suspect this mind-body method may be even more effective if you begin working with a hypnotherapist or listening to a self-hypnosis recording at least a month before your operation.

Bigger Waistlines Boost Colon-Cancer Risk

Abdominal fat has been linked with yet another health concern: colon cancer. An analysis of 30 long-term studies suggests that obesity increases the likelihood of colon cancer by 30 percent in men and by 12 percent in women and that fat added to the middle may be especially significant. In six studies that measured waist circumference, researchers concluded that for every 4 inches gained in the belly, the risk of colon cancer goes up 33 percent in men and 16 percent in women. (*American Journal of Clinical Nutrition*, September 2007)

MY TAKE ▶ The mechanism that links belly fat to colon cancer remains unclear. It's possible a higher risk is due to increased inflammation, which accompanies metabolic syndrome, or is caused by the participants' diets.

Feel Younger: Accentuate the Positives

In this special issue on healthy aging, you'll be reminded of how getting on in years can be a positive experience. But before reading further, you may want to do an attitude check: A growing amount of evidence suggests that confidence in your physical and mental abilities later in life directly relates to how well your mind and body age.

Instead of being afraid of growing older, looking forward to it could actually help you live longer, say Yale researchers. Results of a 23-year study of people aged 50 and older revealed that those who had held a positive attitude toward aging lived roughly 7.5 years longer than participants who were dreading reaching their twilight years. A good attitude may also improve quality of life. One study of 1,558 older adults concluded that participants who had a positive outlook on life were significantly less likely to become frail than those with a negative view (*Journal of Psychology and Aging*, September 2004). And the benefits aren't limited to your physical abilities. Scientists at Brandeis University found that out of 335 adults aged 21 to 83, those who perceived greater control over cognitive function did better on memory tests despite their age.

While growing older has its challenges, I encourage you to recognize its positive aspects and appreciate qualities that get better with age. I hope this issue inspires you to make healthy choices to remain active, vigorous, and mentally sharp in all phases of life.



Andrew Weil, MD

Optimistic Moves

Seniors with low expectations of what they can do at an advanced age are more likely to lead a sedentary lifestyle than their more positive-minded peers.

MIND-BODY WELLNESS

How Does Stress Age You?

The speed at which you age is heavily influenced by how well you handle stress. I believe that over-stimulation of the sympathetic nervous system is a major stumbling block to healthy aging. Living in a constant state of tension damages your nervous, cardiovascular, and immune systems. There's even evidence that it shortens the lifespan of DNA in your cells.

When you're feeling constantly under the gun, your body produces too much or too little of key hormones (cortisol, adrenaline) and neurotransmitters. Because stress is an interaction between mind and body, over time these imbalances cause you to age faster.

Your Body. A difficult job, family demands, or sweating the small stuff can age your body. Chronic stress:

- *Accelerates wear and tear.*

Imbalances in the chemical messengers involved in arousal or relaxation strain your heart, stiffen your blood vessels, weaken bone, increase systemic inflammation, and dampen your immune response.

- *Interferes with glucose regulation.* A body on alert keeps blood-sugar levels high for quick energy. When this response goes on too long, your risk of developing obesity and type 2 diabetes goes up.

- *Triggers unhealthy habits.* These include smoking, alcohol or drug abuse, lack of exercise, overeating, and social isolation, all of which may contribute to aging.

Your Brain. The mind determines what is threatening and how you respond to it. It's also the most vulnerable organ. Chronic stress:

- *Speeds memory loss.* Cortisol, the adrenal hormone that plays an important role in stress responses, is directly toxic to neurons in the parts of the brain related to memory, causing reversible memory loss in the short term and actual brain atrophy in the long run.

- *Impacts emotional reactivity.* Too much stress, especially in the early years, remodels the brain, affecting how quickly and easily you perceive a threat, react to it, and calm down. It now appears that the perception of

stress ages cellular DNA more than its duration or degree.

- *Increases depression and anxiety.* These two mood disorders are linked to a variety of age-related diseases.

Staying Balanced. You can neutralize these harmful effects by learning how to reset your "stress thermostat." Regular use of a relaxation technique such as meditation or breath work can dial down emotional reactivity, giving your body a chance to repair and renew itself. You can't get these benefits by more passive approaches such as watching television, but only by what I call "active relaxation," the repeated practice of a technique until it's powerful and easily accessible when needed.

There are other ways to feel more centered, starting with a healthy diet, a good night's sleep, and regular exercise. Cognitive-behavioral therapy, which focuses on changing how you perceive and react to stress, can be extremely helpful, as can good relationships. Loneliness can create a heightened state of arousal, so caring family and friends and satisfying community involvement may help you stay younger. 

A Body-Mind-Spirit Wellness Plan to Age Gracefully

Aging well is a lifelong process, but picking up healthy habits is a good idea in any decade. To look and feel younger than your years, I encourage you to consume an anti-inflammatory diet (see page 6 on foods for longevity) and to practice a mind-body technique such as yoga, breath work, or meditation in order to stay vital and mentally sharp. It's also important not to walk this journey alone; identify and spend time with people who embody healthy aging and follow their lead.

I have also asked experts in the field for their top lifestyle recommendations for aging gracefully and compiled their valuable advice into a whole-person wellness plan for body, mind, and spirit. Following this plan will maximize your health and happiness during any stage of life.

BODY

► **Keep moving.** "Walk at least 30 minutes a day with a friend for companionship and as a motivator to exercise," suggests Michael Roizen, MD, the coauthor, most recently, of *You: Staying Young* (Free Press, 2007), chief wellness officer of the Cleveland Clinic, and chairman of the Wellness Institute.

► **Eat turmeric and tomatoes.** "Consume turmeric (found in curry and yellow American mustard) daily and at least 10 tablespoons of tomato sauce a week," suggests Dr. Roizen. "Turmeric decreases the risk of Alzheimer's disease and memory loss in general, while tomatoes slow aging of the arteries and immune system."

► **Be agile in body and mind.** "Mental flexibility is the ability to let go of the way you saw things when you were younger," says Ann Marie Chiasson, MD, a Tucson-based integrative physician and energy-medicine practitioner. "You need to switch the filters or the stances you were using in your 20s and 30s, so that by 60 or 70 you have an expanded, softer view of the world." Crucial, she adds, is the ability to forgive and open up to things you may have blocked after a bad experience. Dr. Chiasson teaches people to do this and become less rigid through meditation, but anything may work. "For some people," she says, "it could be reading the book *Chicken Soup for the Soul*."

Mental and physical flexibility are deeply related and affect each other, says Dr. Chiasson. To stay supple and release stiffness throughout the body, she suggests simple stretches, especially in the hips to maintain mobility. Sit cross-legged on the floor with heels close to the body or sit with your legs out, then bring each heel to your lap one at a time.

► **Stay spunky.** "In many traditions throughout the world, the underlying idea of vitality is that you are born with a set amount of energy that depletes around age 40," explains Dr. Chiasson. "So you need to gather energy from the earth every day." Since the body's core energy center is in the lower belly, touching the ground and moving the lower part of the body is necessary, she says. Walking is great, but she also suggests three invigorating exercises. Each takes only five minutes to perform; try doing them twice a day.

► **Shaking bones:** Pretend you're a marionette, with a cord going from the crown of your head to the sky. Gently shake the whole body. Use fast-paced music when you shake.

► **Toe-tapping:** Put on rhythmic music. Lie on your back and tap the sides of your big toes together. (Movement should be from loose hips, not forced from the legs.)

► **Qigong pose:** Stand with your feet shoulder-width apart and knees bent, then gently bounce up and down. Tap firmly with closed fists on your lower abdomen (two to four inches below the navel), where your core energy is housed.

► **Get a stress test.** "I recommend that men over age 40 and women over 50 ask their doctor for a stress test to allay fear about physical activity," says Dan Bornstein, my personal trainer. "You may learn your heart can go up to 130 beats per minute without anything bad happening."

► **Find the right exercise.** "If I had to narrow exercise down to two forms, it would be walking and yoga; but everyone needs to find activities that meet their physical needs and interests," says Bornstein. "Part of growing older is realizing you can't do some of the things you did in your 20s and 30s, but there is always some type of exercise to enjoy." He says the bare minimum to ward off major disease is 30 minutes of moderately intense exercise four to five days a week.

If you choose yoga, Bornstein suggests *anusura* yoga, "which focuses on teaching the technique, while presenting a challenge and introducing people to the spiritual side of the practice." (Visit yogaalliance.org to find a teacher.) As for walking, he suggests people pay attention to intensity. "On a scale of one to 10, with one being lying in bed and 10 being running to exhaustion, three to four is moderate intensity," he says. "If you want to burn more calories, work up to the five-to-six range, which is comfortably uncomfortable."

► **Make room for recovery.** "Letting your body recoup after a workout allows you to exercise at a higher intensity for a longer duration and longer into life," says Bornstein. He suggests spending equal amounts of time on aerobic activity, strength training, and recovery. "People of all ages don't spend enough time on stretching and massage."

MIND

► **Connect with other generations.** "Maintaining ties with different age groups helps you and others to grow and share wisdom," says geriatrician Evan Kligman, MD, co-director of the Arizona Center on Aging and Arizona Geriatric Education Center. To do this, he recommends continuing to serve throughout life. "Volunteering or simply reading to young people can be a great way to make a difference," he says.

► **Be a child at heart.** "Retaining youthful characteristics as you age—such as humor, curiosity, playfulness, and spontaneity—is important to maintain a sense of adaptation and optimism," points out Dr. Kligman.

► **Get involved.** "It's important to maintain a sense of meaning and purpose," says Dan Shapiro, PhD, an author and associate professor at the University of Arizona. "People

who stay involved in their communities, whether it's writing letters to the editor of the local paper or joining an organization, stay vibrant longer."

► **Trust someone.** Numerous studies have found powerful health perks from maintaining social ties and cultivating close relationships rather than having just casual companions. To make sure you have a bond with someone in your life, Shapiro suggests asking yourself: "Do I have a confidant?" If not, following the advice in this article is a good starting point to foster these connections.

SPIRIT

► **Have a purpose.** "Find something in your life you like to do, whether it's rooting for the Cleveland Browns, reading up on a subject, or volunteering at a hospice," says Dr. Roizen.

To look into options, he suggests taking a class in something you've never explored, continuing a hobby you enjoy, or pursuing a passion from your past.

► **Build a legacy.** "Pass down the wisdom and values from your life to family, friends, and your community by leaving a legacy," says Dr. Kligman. He suggests keeping a journal throughout life. As you advance in years, he says, you can write down life lessons and reflections along with your hopes for the future, often called an ethical will; you can even make a spoken version or video of such a will. Other approaches that can live on for generations are writing a spiritual autobiography and recording an oral history. "Leaving a legacy allows you to define your purpose and interconnect with others," explains Dr. Kligman. For more information, see *Ethical Wills* by Barry K. Baines, MD (Da Capo, 2006), or visit ethicalwill.com. 

MIND-BODY WELLNESS

Allow Your Creativity to Flourish

Your fifties and beyond can be a particularly creative time, and this doesn't apply just to artists and musicians. I've found that my life experience has afforded me a great network of ideas that allow for creativity in many areas, from clinical medicine to writing books and articles, and I'm not alone. Studies on aging show that the potential for greater creative expression in the second half of life is not the exception but the rule.

One explanation for the blossoming of creativity is that the human brain adapts and changes with age. Studies show that older adults, unlike their younger counterparts, tend to use both sides of the brain to complete tasks. Although scientists don't yet know the benefits of this adaptation, merging the logical and analytical left brain with the intuitive and creative right hemisphere may allow people to better use their resources and talents. Below I'll discuss some other reasons why creativity may thrive with age.

Improved social skills. When you are older, the capacity to ride out emotional storms with more flexibility and resilience is partly due to experience, learning, and practice, along with natural changes in how

the brain deals with emotions, says Gene Cohen, MD, PhD, director of the Center on Aging, Health & Humanities at George Washington University. These brain changes with aging alter how you respond to outside forces. For instance, when scientists looked at the minds of adults from various generations faced with a challenge, they found that older adults remained calmer and younger adults held onto negative feelings longer. Dr. Cohen suggests this emotional stability leads to courage and collaboration with others, which cultivates creativity.

Better problem solving. While you lose some abilities with age, others may improve. Vocabulary, for example, has been found to increase among older adults who continue to challenge themselves intellectually, which may explain the large number of senior Scrabble clubs across the country. Everyday problems may also be easier to solve. Dr. Cohen opens his most recent book, *The Mature Mind: The Positive Power of the Aging Brain* (Basic Books, 2005), with a story about his in-laws as an example of pragmatic creativity later in life. During a snowstorm in Washington, DC, his father-in-law couldn't find a cab, so he went into

a nearby restaurant and asked for a large pizza to be delivered to where he was staying, under one condition—that the delivery driver take him and his wife with it.

More emotional freedom. In her late 50s, Sara Davidson, a successful screenwriter and journalist, couldn't find work, endured a breakup with a longtime partner, and sent her last child off to college. In the midst of despair, she set out to discover how other boomers were handling their midlife choices, which she compiled into her most recent book, *Leap!* (Random House, 2007), and writes about on saradavidson.com. What she found was that people were exploring careers, relationships, and lifestyles they would have never thought of in their younger years.

At the end of her four years of research, Davidson not only revived her career, but attained the same feeling of freedom so many of her interviewees described. "I'm totally open and curious about what comes next and less attached to the outcome or people's responses," she says. This liberation phase, explains Dr. Cohen, occurs naturally and is characterized by the inner voice that asks "If not now, when?" and "What can they do to me?" 

Top Foods for a Long Life

Eating right can increase your chances of staying healthy to a ripe old age. And I believe an anti-inflammatory diet is one key to longevity, because inappropriate inflammation sets the stage for most chronic diseases, including cardiovascular problems and Alzheimer's. This diet is also antioxidant-rich, which may counteract oxidative damage linked to the changes of aging. Here are my recommendations on how to eat to live long and well.

Select healthy fats. One of the most important steps in reducing inflammation is to eat more omega-3 fatty acids, which may reduce your risk of a heart attack and help prevent Alzheimer's disease and dementia. Get them by eating wild salmon, black cod, sardines, and omega-3 fortified eggs. It's also essential to limit your consumption of omega-6 fatty acids. These pro-inflammatory fats are found in safflower, sunflower, corn, and, most noteworthy, soy oils. The easiest way to cut down on them is to reduce or eliminate processed, manufactured, and fast food, including snack foods like chips. Use extra-virgin olive oil for cooking, and banish trans fats from your diet.

Choose slow-digesting carbs. Increase your intake of whole grains, beans, and root vegetables, including sweet potatoes, turnips, and beets, all of which have a low glycemic load. The blood-sugar spikes caused by quickly digested, processed carbs increase your risk of insulin resistance and may accelerate the aging process. I believe high levels of sugar in the blood interact with proteins to produce toxic compounds called advanced glycation end products or AGEs, which trigger inflammation and damage cellular structures.

Cut Calories, Add Years?

Researchers have long known that a very-low-calorie diet lengthens the lives of fruit flies and mice. The same may hold true for humans, says a study in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* (April 5, 2006). The trial involved 48 overweight people. After six months, those who cut caloric intake by 25 percent and ate as little as 1,550 calories a day had reduced fasting insulin levels, a lower body temperature, and reduced DNA damage compared to people on a weight-maintenance diet. All three changes are linked to longevity. Meanwhile, scientists at Harvard Medical School announced in September that the stress of caloric restriction appears to rev up two genes, SIRT3 and SIRT4 (members of the same family as the gene that responds to resveratrol), which make enzymes for mitochondria, the power stations of cells. This process seems to slow cell aging.

MY TAKE ▶ These results, though intriguing, don't change my mind about caloric restriction: The difficulties of slashing calories severely (frequent hunger and feeling deprived) aren't worth it, since there's no guarantee that it will extend your life. I do, however, think modest calorie cuts—a few hundred a day—can be beneficial for health.

Eat the rainbow. Consume an abundance of fresh fruits and vegetables filled with disease-fighting antioxidants. I like the approach of David Heber, MD, PhD, director of the Center for Human Nutrition at the University of California, Los Angeles, and author of *What Color Is Your Diet?* (Regan Books, 2002). He recommends eating as many colors as you can each day, from red raspberries to orange pumpkin to green arugula. "It's important to get a variety of phytonutrients," Dr. Heber says. "Our bodies evolved to expect these substances in our diet."

Sample a range of berries. It's worth singling out these fruits for their potent antioxidants. Blueberries pack a polyphenol punch, but don't limit yourself to one berry variety. Dr. Heber says to snack on raspberries and blackberries, and sip pomegranate juice, which contains more antioxidants than any other berry (yes, to botanists a pomegranate fruit is a berry). One small study found that people with coronary heart disease who drank pomegranate juice daily for three months experienced increased blood flow to the heart (*American Journal of Cardiology*, September 2005). As an added bonus, berries help keep blood sugar stable.

Cook up leafy greens. These vegetables deserve a daily spot on your plate to protect your eyes and bones. Collards, kale, and turnip greens are excellent sources of lutein and zeaxanthin, carotenoids that may protect against macular degeneration. Leafy greens also contain calcium and vitamin K, two nutrients important for bone health.

Drink to youth. Sip four cups of white, green, or oolong tea daily; they contain EGCG, a powerful antioxidant. You've probably heard the news about resveratrol, a compound in red-wine grapes that allowed lab mice to live longer and avoid health problems typically caused by weight gain. Humans can't get comparable amounts of resveratrol by consuming red wine or grapes, and the jury is still out on the safety and effectiveness of supplements. But if you already consume alcohol, a daily glass of red wine is a healthy choice for its heart-protective polyphenols.

Nibble on nuts. Dr. Heber says a handful of tree nuts may be the perfect snack for a long life. Researchers at Loma Linda University found nuts stave off hunger without causing weight gain, despite their fattening reputation. In addition, tree nuts offer some of the beneficial phytonutrients also found in fruits and vegetables. For example, the green flesh of pistachios provides lutein, the bitter skin of walnuts contains the ellagitannins also found in pomegranates, and the brown skin of almonds is rich in polyphenols also found in citrus fruits. Studies show that eating nuts can lower LDL cholesterol, and pistachios and almonds may further protect your heart by slowing the absorption of sugar into your blood if eaten after a high-carbohydrate meal. **SP**

Ask Dr. Weil Organic Nuts; Freezing in Plastic; TUMS; & More

Is it important to eat organic nuts and nut butters versus non-organic?

Tree nuts such as almonds, walnuts, and cashews concern me less, since their shells protect against pesticide residues. But I'm wary of peanuts, which are legumes that grow underground and are more likely to be contaminated. Storing peanuts makes them susceptible to attack by a mold that produces a potent carcinogen, called aflatoxin. Organic peanuts are probably no safer in this respect.

Organic nut butters tend to be healthier than conventional varieties because they're primarily ground-up nuts with minimal salt and no hydrogenated vegetable oils or added sweeteners. But oils in organic nut butters separate while on the shelf and need a good stir before spreading.

Is taking too much supplemental vitamin D dangerous?

It's highly unlikely. Most experts estimate an adult would have to take a massive dose—roughly 40,000 to 50,000 IU a day (or 100 to 125 of the 400 IU capsules)—for several months to achieve toxicity. In theory, you can overload on the vitamin by getting too much sun (which causes your body to produce vitamin D) combined with taking a high prescription or supplemental dose (such as large amounts of cod-liver oil). Megadoses can raise blood levels of calcium and possibly lead to confusion and heart-rhythm disturbances. Other symptoms of vitamin D toxicity include nausea, weakness, and weight loss. Again, this is extremely rare. The tolerable upper intake level set by the Food and Nutrition Board of the Institute of Medicine in 1997 is 2,000 IU a day of vitamin D for adults, an amount now considered very conservative among scientists. Indeed, some researchers recommend this amount to reduce the risk of breast and colorectal cancers.

I wouldn't worry about vitamin D toxicity; the bigger concern is getting too little of this essential nutrient from diet, supplements, or sun exposure.

I advise taking at least 1,000 IU a day of vitamin D3 (cholecalciferol).

I received an email that said freezing water in plastic releases harmful chemicals. Is this true?

Emails containing warnings to avoid freezing water in plastic bottles in order to reduce exposure to carcinogens are false, and one that keeps popping up is erroneously attributed to Johns Hopkins University. There is no scientific evidence to suggest that freezing food or beverages in plastic is harmful, but many kitchen plastics could potentially leach chemicals, especially when they are exposed to heat or used to store fatty foods like cheese and meat. Based on animal studies, scientists fear that even low levels of some chemicals, such as bisphenol A (BPA) and polyvinyl chloride (PVC), might reduce immunity and affect memory in adults, and cause cancer and irreversible organ damage in fetuses and children. For these reasons, I avoid using plastic containers and use only ceramic, glass, or metal varieties for storage.

If you like the convenience of plastic, I suggest avoiding PVC (labeled #3), found in some cooking-oil bottles and plastic wrap, and BPA (often classified as #7), found in many polycarbonate plastics such as baby bottles, beverage containers, and those marked as microwaveable. However, it's probably fine to freeze fat-free and cold foods in bags and containers made of polyethylene (labeled #1, #2, or #4) and polypropylene (labeled #5). These products have not been shown to cause harm. If a container isn't numbered, you'd have to contact the manufacturer for more information on its materials.

Are TUMS a good calcium source?

I consider the over-the-counter antacid a perfectly good source of calcium carbonate, and many find it to be a pleasant-tasting and inexpensive way to get the mineral. Each tablet contains 200 to 400 mg of elemental calcium. (Some forms of Rolaids also

provide calcium carbonate.) While calcium carbonate is a good supplement choice for those on a limited budget (take it with meals), it may not be as well absorbed as calcium citrate, the form I recommend especially for older people. Calcium citrate is typically more expensive and the pills are larger, but it's still my top choice for seniors, who typically have less stomach acid. A sufficient amount of acid in the stomach is needed to absorb calcium carbonate, the type found in TUMS. I advise women to get no more than 700 mg daily of supplemental calcium and 1,000 to 1,200 mg from food and supplements combined; men should aim for a total of 500 to 600 mg from all sources, primarily food.

A recent study suggested that taking selenium raises the risk of diabetes. What are your thoughts?

There's no reason to be too concerned. The study, which was published in the *Annals of Internal Medicine* (August 21, 2007), involved people with a history of nonmelanoma skin cancer. Among participants with higher blood levels of selenium at the trial's start, people who took 200 mcg of the mineral daily were more likely to develop type 2 diabetes over a seven-year period than those taking a placebo.

However, it's unclear if these preliminary findings apply to individuals who haven't had skin cancer, and the study didn't consider other diabetes risk factors such as a sedentary lifestyle and family history. What's more, other research suggests selenium supplementation may help prevent vascular complications in people with diabetes.

Until there's better evidence, I continue to recommend that everyone take 200 mcg of selenium daily for its antioxidant effects. But don't take more: Too much can have unhealthy effects on hair and nails. Choose organic yeast-bound forms of the mineral, which are better absorbed. **SP**

Please send your health questions to Ask Dr. Weil, Self Healing, 42 Pleasant St., Watertown MA 02472.

Three Things You Might Not Know about Aging

1 Aging occurs in spurts. While children have growth spurts, grown-ups experience aging spurts, suggests Mark Liponis, MD, in his new book, *UltraLongevity* (Little, Brown, 2007). These periods correlate with times of an overactive immune system, he says. They may explain why someone who just had a significant health crisis, whether it's pneumonia or bypass surgery, may "look 10 years older." When the immune system undergoes intense and prolonged activation, it can trigger a more profound aging spurt, says Dr. Liponis. "Damage to organs and loss of function may happen more quickly than other times," he explains. It might not always be visible, but you would find immune activation in blood tests: White-blood-cell counts rise, which is protective in defending you from external threats but potentially harmful if it goes on too long. C-reactive protein (CRP) levels (ideally, less than .7 mg/liter) are an even better measure of immune function, says Dr. Liponis. Higher CRP levels reflect a more active immune system, and can help predict a greater chance of heart disease, stroke, and some cancers.

MY TAKE ▶ This was a new and intriguing idea to me, one that makes sense. Avoiding aging spurts caused by unnecessary immune activation can result in a longer, healthier life.

2 Emotions stabilize. Behavioral studies suggest that as people get older, they typically become happier, less neurotic, and have more control over their emotions, especially negative feelings. To see how emotional stability changes, researchers in Australia tracked 242 people aged 12 to 79 to observe how their brains responded while attempting to recognize fearful, happy, or neutral facial expressions. Magnetic resonance images found that middle-aged and older participants were less bothered by fear than the younger folks. Their amygdalas, which process emotion, were less reactive to it, while their prefrontal cortexes, which handle planning and judgment, were more active (*Journal of Neuroscience*, June 14, 2006). The ability to manage emotions likely improves with age, meaning people can look forward to a greater sense of satisfaction, says lead researcher Lea Williams.

MY TAKE ▶ I think moods mellow with age because people are more accepting of change and less reactive to it. In addition, older adults place more events in the context of their life experience, which may smooth over some rough aspects of character.

3 Frailty may tip off heart disease. Researchers now suspect a key reason that older people become frail stems from undetected cardiovascular disease and not solely advanced age. Blocked blood vessels can sap strength and mobility—even in those with no outward signs of heart disease. Frailty was previously called "failure to thrive," a diagnosis borrowed from pediatrics, explains geriatrician Brent Ridge, MD, who helped launch the newly opened Martha Stewart Center for Living at Mount Sinai School of Medicine in New York City. "But Linda Fried, MD, of Johns Hopkins came up with a definition for a geriatrics-specific syndrome in the late 1990s." Dr. Fried defined a frail person as someone over 65 with three or more of the following symptoms: unintentional weight loss of 10 pounds or more in a year (loss of muscle mass is a central element), exhaustion during normal activities, weakness (seen as reduced hand-grip strength), slow walking speed, and a low level of physical activity. If cardiovascular disease is one underlying cause of frailty (along with severe arthritis and osteoporosis), its biological mechanism may be that impeded blood flow to the legs could slow walking, possibly leading to muscle atrophy; poor circulation to the brain can also make people tired.

MY TAKE ▶ Lifestyle changes can delay frailty and help reverse physical decline, and there's good evidence that strength training can help older people regain muscle and mobility. **SP**

Good for You!

Giving Thanks with a Celebration Visit

Here are three ways to show gratitude in person or in thought.

- Write a letter that pays tribute to the qualities or traits of someone close to you. Describe that person's courage, loyalty, kindness, intelligence, and wit—all qualities worth treasuring. Set aside a time to read that person your letter and not only thank them but truly celebrate with them the many miracles of their life.
- In a similar spirit, pay a celebration visit to strangers as a volunteer visitor to a nursing home, hospital, or shelter. Extend a smile, hand, or open heart to make others feel good.
- Or make a mental visit to those who have celebrated you—by mentoring or believing in you—and who have passed away. Keep a list of these individuals and turn to it when life is difficult, and remember the warmth you felt in each person's presence.

Source: Why Good Things Happen to Good People by Stephen Post, PhD, and Jill Neimark (Broadway, 2007)

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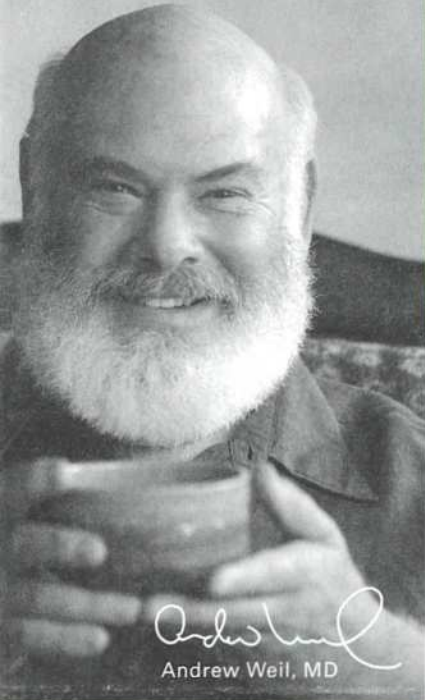
next issue

Top Cold Remedies

Smarter Snacking

Winterize Your Body

How to Listen Better



Andrew Weil, MD

Dr. Andrew Weil's

DECEMBER 2007

self healing

CREATING OPTIMUM HEALTH FOR YOUR BODY AND SOUL

5 Ways to Winterize Your Body & Mind

Come December, I stock up on local squash and sweet potatoes to satisfy my desire for heartier foods, and I adjust my sleep schedule to the changing light by hitting the sack sooner and waking later. Planning ahead helps me better enjoy the shifts in season. Gearing up for colder temperatures is a good idea not only for homes and cars but also for bodies and minds. Here's my advice to weather the winter successfully.

1 Maintain energy. Stick to your exercise routine even if you need to take your workout indoors. When outside, blood vessels constrict as temperatures drop, making the heart, lungs, and other organs work harder. Warming up slowly helps your body adjust to the elements, as can dressing in layers of sweat-wicking clothing.

If you spend little time outdoors, consider a light box or visor, which emits light 10 to 20 times brighter than normal indoor sources. Research shows light therapy helps prevent seasonal affective disorder (SAD), or winter depression. Start with 20 minutes a day; increase time as needed.

2 Get your blood moving. Warm up your extremities by doing aerobic exercise and adding red pepper (*Capsicum* spp.) to meals, which has been shown to improve circulation. For a quick fix, try a warm bath.

3 Protect your skin. During winter, people living in warm climates may experience low humidity outside, while those in colder places deal with it in heated buildings. Dry skin is the result, says D'Anne Kleinsmith, MD, a dermatologist in West Bloomfield, Michigan. She suggests using a daily oil-based moisturizer with shea butter or face lotions with hyaluronic acid to combat dryness. And don't forget to apply a sunscreen with SPF 15 year-round.

To prevent chapped lips, "first stop licking them," says Dr. Kleinsmith. "Saliva

contains salt, which is drying." Instead, dampen lips with water and use Vaseline, or a similar ointment, to lock in moisture.

Although you can't change the air outdoors, balance dry indoor air that can sap skin's moisture (and affect sinuses) by opening a window, placing bowls of water around your home, or using a humidifier.

4 Consider nutrients. Especially in northern latitudes, I recommend taking at least 1,000 IU a day of vitamin D3 (cholecalciferol), a hormone your skin produces when exposed to sunlight. Even if you eat fish a few times a week, boost your omega-3 fatty acids by taking 2 to 3 grams of fish oil daily to ward off SAD.

5 Fight colds and flu. Thwart germs' route into your body: Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth, and wash hands often or use a hand sanitizer. I also recommend a flu shot. If you're concerned about the preservative thimerosal, which contains mercury, there are thimerosal-free options.

To boost immunity, take two capsules of a standardized extract of the herb astragalus twice daily. Monitoring your indoor environment may also help. One study found that the flu virus spreads more easily in low temperatures and low humidity (*PLoS Pathogens*, October 2007). If you do get sick, see page 4 for remedies.

TIPS

FOR BETTER HEALTH

■ An **apple** a day may keep calories away. People who ate 1 1/2 medium apples (some 125 calories) about 15 minutes before lunch consumed 187 fewer calories at the meal than when they had a similar caloric amount of apple-sauce or apple juice beforehand.

■ A few **meditation** sessions could help you handle stress better. Compared to those who learned progressive muscle relaxation, college students who got 20 minutes of meditation training for five days had lower cortisol levels after a difficult math test.

■ A **lower-fat** diet may cut the risk of ovarian cancer. Women who trimmed their fat intake to about 20 percent of total calories and also ate more produce and whole grains were 40 percent less likely to develop this malignancy than women who didn't.

■ **Quercetin** can lower blood pressure, as well as address hay fever. People with hypertension who took nearly 750 mg of the flavonoid daily for a month saw systolic pressure drop by 7 points and diastolic pressure by 5 points.

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HEALTH IN THE NEWS

Does Aspirin Help Men's Hearts More than Women's?

Low-dose aspirin therapy to protect against heart attack may be more effective for men than for women, say Canadian scientists who analyzed 23 studies of more than 113,000 people. Trials with a higher proportion of men showed greater reductions in heart-attack risk, while studies with more women didn't show significant benefits. Researchers said that the makeup of a woman's heart and blood vessels may be more resistant to aspirin. (*BMC Medicine*, October 18, 2007)

MY TAKE ▶ These findings show possible gender differences to the same medication, and point out the need for individual assessment of risks versus benefits for aspirin therapy. But this is hardly the last word: A large study published in March *did* link long-term aspirin use by women with a reduced risk of dying from any cause.

Acupuncture Takes Away the Pain of Surgery

Getting acupuncture before and during surgery eases patients' discomfort after the operation and their need for pain-relieving drugs. An analysis of 15 clinical trials suggests that patients who received the ancient needling technique felt significantly less pain afterward, used less painkilling medication, and had fewer side effects from them. Researchers, who presented their findings at a conference of the American Society of Anesthesiologists, reported that acupuncture diminished nausea by 50 percent and dizziness by 60 percent.

MY TAKE ▶ I think this is valuable information to keep in mind if you're scheduled for surgery. These findings may lead more patients to take advantage of acupuncture, increase its acceptance among surgeons and anesthesiologists, and help make it available at more hospitals. The less pain medication needed by surgical patients, the better off they may feel both physically and mentally.

More Vitamin C, Fewer Wrinkles?

By examining the influence of nutrients on aging skin, scientists found that women who ate a healthy dose of vitamin C-rich foods had fewer wrinkles than those who consumed less. The results come from data on some 4,000 women aged 40 to 75 who had dermatologic exams to evaluate wrinkling and completed 24-hour food records. (*American Journal of Clinical Nutrition*, October 2007)

MY TAKE ▶ Topical vitamin C may influence collagen formation and improve skin's texture, but I don't know that this study proves that consuming more of one vitamin prevents wrinkles. Foods rich in this nutrient are mainly fresh fruits and vegetables, which have many protective substances. Factors such as genes and environment also play a role in maintaining skin's elasticity.

How Panic Hurts the Heart

Panic now joins depression, anger, and hostility as emotional states that seem to increase heart-disease risk. Of nearly 3,400 postmenopausal women, those who reported having a panic attack in the six months before the study began were four times more likely to have a heart attack or stroke during a five-year follow-up period than other participants. (*Archives of General Psychiatry*, October 2007)

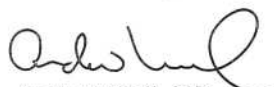
MY TAKE ▶ This is the first research to hint at a link between panic attacks and cardiovascular risk, and I find the connection interesting. The mechanism is unclear, but I'd speculate that increased activation of the sympathetic nervous system in panic-prone people may predispose them to blood clots and sudden cardiac death. One of the lead authors said another explanation could be that panic attacks might be a symptom of undetected heart disease.

Welcoming the Winter Solstice

It's no coincidence that the winter solstice, which takes place on the shortest day of the year and marks the onset of the season, is surrounded by numerous holidays. It's the day when the sun is at its lowest point in the sky. But it's also the point when the light will begin to return. Since ancient times, people have celebrated this rebirth of sunlight, and I plan to do so on December 22.

I've been welcoming the solstice since the 1970s, when I became aware of its significance to our mind, body, and spirit. I enjoy connecting with nature's life cycle and celebrating the sun's energy with customs rooted in history. Traditions such as dancing, feasting, and chanting to bring the sun back can be traced to Native Americans, while gathering by a fire may be linked to Scandinavia's Norsemen, who burned Yule logs to mark the continuity of light from one year to another.

To celebrate this year, I'll spend the evening with close friends—preparing holiday foods and sitting around a fire, telling stories and singing. We usually choose an eclectic mix of our favorite songs from the book *Rise Up Singing* (Sing Out Publications, 2004). Getting together with loved ones as the longest night rolls in adds warmth and brightness to the occasion. Such traditions stave off the malaise of winter, and I find them therapeutic. Although the harshest weather is yet to come in many parts of the country, I hope you find ways to enjoy this festive evening energetically, cosmically, and symbolically. Happy holidays.


Andrew Weil, MD

Save the Date

In the Earth's Northern Hemisphere, the winter solstice occurs December 21 or 22 and the summer solstice June 21 or 22. (In the Southern Hemisphere, the solstices are reversed.)

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Dietary Duos: Food Pairs That Make a Good Match

Besides great flavor, there's another benefit to enjoying certain foods together.

It's what nutritionists call food synergy—meaning the interaction of two or more nutrients in foods offers a greater health benefit than they would on their own. Examples of food synergy might already be on your plate: The antioxidant effects of red apples, blueberries, grapes, and oranges are greater when eaten together, such as in a fruit salad. Another dietary duo that I enjoy is guacamole and salsa: The monounsaturated fat in avocados helps the body better absorb lycopene, a carotenoid in tomatoes. (Drizzling olive oil over other carotenoid-rich vegetables, such as leafy greens or root vegetables, offers a similar perk.)

Here are more top twosomes that will boost your nutrient intake.

Vitamin C and Iron. The body can absorb only 2 to 20 percent of non-heme iron (found mostly in plant-based foods). Studies have found that enjoying vitamin C-rich foods along with iron-rich ones like kidney

beans increases iron absorption by three- to six-fold. This is a key finding for vegetarians and meat eaters: Non-heme iron makes up 85 to 90 percent of all dietary iron consumed.

Try: Vegetarian chili with red bell peppers; citrus fruits on raw spinach.

Vitamin B-6 and Magnesium.

Teaming up B-6 and magnesium not only helps control behavioral problems associated with autism, but one review found this pairing also reduces PMS symptoms, such as mood changes and fluid retention.

Try: Almonds and fortified oatmeal; beet greens and chickpeas.

Vitamin B-12 and Folate.

These two B vitamins, which are important for healthy nerves and blood cells, also help reduce serum homocysteine, a breakdown product of animal protein that in high levels is thought to damage the lining of arteries, contributing to heart attack. And a recent study finds the combo may work together to protect cognitive function and prevent anemia (low iron) in people 60 and older.

Older adults with normal B-12 and high folate levels in their blood performed best on cognitive tests and were less likely to be anemic compared to people with low B-12 or low folate levels (*American Journal of Clinical Nutrition*, January 2007).

Try: Lentils and wild sockeye salmon; eggs and spinach.

Vitamin E and Selenium.

Together these powerful antioxidants reduce inflammation, and ongoing research funded by the National Cancer Institute suggests the duo may protect against prostate cancer.

Try: Spinach with Brazil nuts; kale and sardines.

Vitamins C and E. To reduce oxidative stress caused by free radicals in the body, scientists have found that marrying vitamin C and E forms an ideal union. Studies suggest this coupling lowers cancer risk and protects the cardiovascular system by reducing LDL ("bad") cholesterol and preventing blood clots.

Try: Roasted almonds and broccoli; hazelnuts and strawberries. 

Natural Relief for Colds and Flu: My Picks and Pans

Being an integrative physician does not make me immune to catching a cold or the flu. But it does make me familiar with a wide array of treatment options from nature, the kitchen, and the pharmacy.

When I'm sick with either of these illnesses, I get plenty of rest and make sure to eat lighter and focus on foods containing healing herbs like ginger and garlic. And to cut my odds of falling ill in the first place, I take extra caution to guard against germs by avoiding contact with people who are sick as well as washing my hands frequently.

Countering a Cold

When cold symptoms first flare up, I start taking echinacea, andrographis, or astragalus to strengthen my immune system and fight the virus. I may also up my vitamin C dosage from 200 mg to 1,000 or 2,000 mg daily. And for further help, I turn to garlic and ginger.

Echinacea. One of my favorite herbal cold-busters is echinacea, a member of the aster family of flowers. I prefer tinctures, but you can also get this antiviral, immune-boosting herb in capsule form. Use my recommended dosage below or follow package directions, although the amount suggested on certain products may be too low to fortify your defenses.

Make sure to select products made with *Echinacea purpurea*, the species found to be most helpful in treatment of colds. Bastyr University physician David Kiefer, MD, also suggests scanning product labels to find tinctures and supplements that come from cultivated plants, given concerns about the sustainability of echinacea gathered from the wild.

Although several studies over the years have deemed echinacea ineffective for combatting colds, a meta-analysis published in *Lancet Infectious Diseases* last July found that the herb lowered the odds of developing a cold by 58 percent and shortened its duration by about 1.5 days. I consider

these latest findings to be based on stronger research than many previous reports, some of which tested inadequate dosages or less potent species of echinacea.

Recommended dosage: 1 teaspoon taken four times a day (for tinctures) or 1 gram three times daily (for capsules).

Kan Jang. A popular cold remedy in Scandinavia, the brand-name formula Kan Jang has two immune-enhancing herbs: andrographis and eleutherococcus. Also known as Siberian ginseng, eleutherococcus belongs to a class of herbs called adaptogens, which help the body adapt to stress of all kinds. And andrographis is loaded with compounds that may ward off viruses and inflammation and help shorten the duration and lessen the severity of colds. In fact, one study found that andrographis had a "high degree of effectiveness" in reducing symptoms such as sore throat and cough (*Phytomedicine*, October 1999).

Recommended dosage: two tablets taken three times a day.

Astragalus. When I'm traveling during the cold season, I sometimes take astragalus for protection. This antiviral Chinese herb—the root of a plant in the pea family—can also rev up your immune system once you already feel a cold coming on. And if you're especially prone to catching winter colds, Dr. Kiefer suggests using astragalus every day all season long to shore up immunity.

Rich in antioxidants, amino acids, and minerals, astragalus was better than echinacea at activating immune cells in one pilot study (*Phytotherapy Research*, June 2006).

Recommended dosage: two capsules of a standardized extract taken twice a day.

Ginger. To ease cold symptoms such as chest congestion and stuffed-up sinuses, I sip tea made from fresh ginger. Try this recipe from Tieraona Low Dog, MD, director of education for the University of Arizona's Program in Integrative Medicine in Tucson: Slice up a two-inch chunk of fresh ginger root and cook in 4 cups of water for about 20 minutes. After straining the tea into your cup, stir in the juice of half a lemon and a tablespoon of honey.

Even though it's a natural anti-inflammatory and should be fine for most sore throats, ginger is spicy and can burn or irritate strep throat, Dr. Low Dog warns.

Garlic. Antiviral, antibacterial, and immune-stimulating, garlic offers several cold-busting benefits that prove most powerful when its cloves are eaten raw. At the start of a cold, I eat a clove or two daily, usually mashing or chopping it up and letting it stand for five minutes to activate its key compound (allicin) and mixing it in with my food. If you must cook garlic, add it to your dishes just before they're done—cooking can destroy the beneficial properties.

In one study of 146 volunteers, people who took a garlic supplement every day from November through February recovered faster from colds than did those who took a placebo during the same time (*Advances in Therapy*, July/August 2001). But because garlic supplements can vary widely in quality, you're better off sticking with the herb in its natural form, which is also cheaper.

Skip These Remedies

REMEDY WHY SKIP IT

Airborne	Although these fizzy tablets have some cold-countering ingredients (like echinacea and vitamin C), I think there's a lack of science to support its use.
Zinc lozenges	Since research on their effectiveness is mixed so far, Dr. Kiefer advises shunning zinc lozenges and opting for those made from licorice, especially for a sore throat.
Zicam	There's little evidence this zinc-based homeopathic nasal spray decreases the duration or severity of colds.

Fending Off Flu

Flu symptoms are more severe than those of colds, and typically include fever, body aches, and fatigue. The virus can also lead to serious complications such as pneumonia.

When I had the flu several years ago, I turned to the drug Tamiflu to reduce the severity and duration of the illness. In general, I find that taking prescription antiviral medication is your best bet for thwarting the flu, provided you start using it within two days of experiencing symptoms.

After pharmaceuticals, the most reliable flu remedies are astragalus and andrographis—Kan Jang resulted in a speedier flu recovery than the antiviral drug Symmetrel (amantadine) in one study (*Journal of Herbal Pharmacotherapy*, January 2003). To alleviate flu symptoms, pair your chief antiviral with one or more of the following natural products.

Elderberry. This herbal remedy may help stimulate the immune system in people with the flu, and research suggests

that elderberry extract in syrup form can cut flu duration by about four days (*Journal of International Medical Research*, March/April 2004). I prefer a new elderberry product called Blockade by New Chapter that is available in a blueberry-flavored lozenge (visit 4blockade.com for a retailer).

Recommended dosage: follow package directions.

Lomatium. Lesser-known than the other remedies I've mentioned, this herb shows promise as an immune-system strengthener. Used by Native Americans to treat infections of the lungs, lomatium may act as an antiviral agent.

Recommended dosage: 1 teaspoon in tincture form taken four times a day.

Oscillococcinum. This over-the-counter homeopathic remedy (made from an extract of duck heart and liver) has been shown to slightly shorten flu duration (*Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews*, July 2006).

Recommended dosage: one tube of the pellets taken three times a day. 

LIFELONG FITNESS

Dance Your Way to Better Health

Some of the healthiest seniors I know dance regularly. And thanks to popular TV shows such as *Dancing with the Stars* and *So You Think You Can Dance*, more people of all ages are ready to rumba or take up tango. I think dancing is a terrific form of exercise that has everything to recommend it: Cutting the rug offers an excellent aerobic workout, it's fun, and it provides the added benefits of social interaction and human touch. Here are more reasons why I believe being light on your feet is a tonic for the body, mind, and spirit.

Tones the body. Dancing burns 200 to 400 or more calories an hour (see chart). Unlike the straight-ahead motion used on treadmills and ellipticals, dance movements are multidirectional, which may benefit joint mobility. Dancing is a lively form of weight-bearing exercise, making it a bone-boosting way to stay in shape. Shaking a leg may also help you stay on your feet: Older adults who regularly participate in social dancing have better balance and gait than wallflowers (*Journal of the American Geriatrics Society*, August 2006). What's more, dancing can benefit even those with serious conditions.

People with mild to moderate congestive heart failure who gave waltzing a whirl breathed better, exercised longer, and generally felt better.

Sharpens the mind. Learning dance steps challenges both the mind and body. In a 2005 study of Canadian seniors, half got tango lessons, while the other half participated in a walking group. After just 10 weeks, both groups had better scores on memory tests, but only those who tangoed improved their multitasking skills. An earlier study offered even more impressive results: Among people aged 75 or older, men and women who danced four times weekly were 76 percent less likely to develop dementia than those who hoofed it only once a week or not at all (*New England Journal of Medicine*, June 19, 2003).

Lifts the spirit. Moving in rhythm to music can be transporting, and indigenous healers in many cultures have used dance to induce trance states as part of healing rituals. Dancing can also ease stress and loneliness, encourage creative expression, and be a great confidence builder.

One small 2007 study (not yet published) from England found that salsa dancing can help tackle depression.

Getting started. Classes or dance-based fitness programs are available at dance studios, health clubs, YMCAs/YWCAs, and adult-

Dancing Off the Calories

Here's how many calories a 150-pound person would burn on the dance floor doing these different forms. (A heavier person would expend more energy, a lighter one less.)	STYLE	CALORIES/HOUR
	Swing	235
	Ballroom	265
	Square	280
	Ballet	300
	Belly	380
	Salsa	420+
	Aerobic	540+

education centers. Try whatever styles appeal to you: I like contra and square dancing, as well as freeform dancing to ethnic and world music. Need more encouragement? Lenore Schaeffer, who participated in competitive ballroom dancing until age 101 and died in 2004 at age 108, said: "It's a wonderful pastime, you'll make friends, and, hopefully, you'll live a lot longer because of it." 

The Healing Power of Listening

When taking histories from patients, I've found that simply giving them permission to tell their stories is most important. "Listening attentively, empathetically, and without interruption may be more valuable than any particular question" that a doctor poses, says Victoria Maizes, MD, executive director of the Program in Integrative Medicine at the University of Arizona. "Allowing patients to hear their own thoughts on intimate matters constitutes a potent therapy in itself."

As you gather with loved ones this holiday season, perhaps the greatest gift of all is to listen with an open mind and open heart. I'll discuss some intriguing findings on how lending an ear can benefit the physical and psychological health of both the listener and the speaker, and I'll offer practical tips for becoming a better listener.

How Listening Heals

When you listen to others, you lower their stress levels and offer them a sounding board to solve their own dilemmas, according to Rebecca Shafir, a Massachusetts-based communications expert and author of *The Zen of Listening* (Quest Books, 2003). She notes research by Texas psychologist James Pennebaker showing that when people were given a chance to discuss a stressful event in their lives with willing listeners, their blood pressure decreased. He also found that having a confidant strengthened the immune system. Being heard also boosts self-esteem: "We feel important when someone takes the time to hear us out," says Shafir.

Listening is also a gift that you give yourself. It strengthens relationships, which can have a powerful influence on health and well-being. It also invigorates the mind: Positron emission tomography (PET) scans reveal that blood flow

increases to many parts of the brain during listening. And it can revitalize your spirit when you're ill. In a 1999 study, five people with multiple sclerosis were trained to offer compassionate listening and support over the phone to other MS patients for two years. These listeners experienced dramatic changes in how they viewed themselves: Self-esteem, self-confidence, and depression all improved markedly.

Learning to Listen Better

Assuming that your hearing isn't a problem, here are my five suggestions for becoming a more skillful listener.

► **Quiet your mind.** "Our internal noise levels are so turbulent and obtrusive that they mask most of what others are saying," asserts Shafir. A major reason for poor listening, this mental interference may include critical judgments, self-doubts and fears, thoughts of the past or future, or planning what you're going to say in response. To reduce inner chatter and help stay in the present moment, consider practicing meditation. Even a daily "mindfulness minute," when you become totally immersed in whatever task is at hand, can improve concentration, she suggests.

► **Talk less.** This may seem obvious, but "you can't multitask speaking and listening," says Linda Eve Diamond, author of *Rule #1: Stop Talking! A Guide to Listening* (Listeners Press, 2007; to order, visit listenersunite.com). "It hardly seems like a coincidence that *silent* is an anagram for *listen*." To get others talking, ask open-ended questions ("What have you been doing since you got into town?") rather than ones that elicit short answers ("How long have you been in town?").

► **Don't interrupt.** Cutting off someone in mid-sentence sends a terrible message, write Mark Brady, PhD, and Jennifer Austin Leigh in *A Little Book of Listening Skills* (Paideia Press, 2005). That message is, "What I have to say is more important than what you have to say. It's so important that I can't contain myself enough to let you finish." To hold your tongue, these authors suggest getting literal: "Place your tongue against the roof of your mouth and hold it there."

► **Don't offer unwanted advice.** "If your opinion has not been invited but you believe that it would be helpful, ask permission to give it," says Diamond. "If the answer is no, drop it." Another option when you're tempted to tell people what they "should" do, suggest Brady and Leigh, is to ask questions that put others in touch with their own inner wisdom, such as "What does your gut tell you?" or "If you're of two minds, what is each telling you?"

► **Don't let your story take over.** When listening to others, you may want to tell your own story to empathize with them. "Resist the impulse," warn Brady and Leigh. Shifting the focus away from the speaker can leave her feeling cut off and disrespected. If you find yourself telling your story in response to someone else's, apologize for interrupting and start listening. **SP**

Getting Your Doctor to Listen

On average, doctors interrupt patients about 20 seconds into explaining their problems. In today's health-care environment, you must be prepared to make the most of a 10-minute doctor's visit. Here's my advice, with help from Rebecca Shafir:

- Before your appointment, write out your questions and concerns, and be aware of patterns of symptoms. (For instance, when did the pain start? When do you feel it? How long does it last?)
- Ask your doctor about the two or three things that worry you the most.
- If your doctor is using unfamiliar medical terms, ask for clarification.
- At the end of your appointment, summarize in a few sentences how you understand his or her recommendations. This can help clear up any confusion and help you remember more of the discussion and advice.

Ask Dr. Weil Probiotics; Flu Shots; Lasers for Pain; and More

Is it a good idea to occasionally change the type of probiotic I use?

If you're taking a probiotic to promote digestive health or boost immunity and it works well for you, then stick with it. Immunologist Sheryl Berman, PhD, at Bastyr University in Seattle, says there's no evidence that changing probiotic species or brands merely for variety offers any health benefits. I typically recommend probiotic supplements that contain *Bacillus coagulans* (BC-30) or *Lactobacillus GG*, two strains known to contribute large supplies of healthy bacteria to the intestinal tract. Probiotic supplements come as tablets, capsules, powders, and refrigerated liquids. (For more on probiotics, see the March 2007 issue.)

What do you suggest for goiter?

I'm not aware of any natural treatments for goiter (an enlarged thyroid gland), and conventional medical approaches vary depending on the symptoms and underlying cause. In any case, it's important to pay close attention to goiter, since hormones produced by your thyroid gland regulate all aspects of metabolism, from the rate your heart beats to the speed you burn calories. If your thyroid is functioning normally, your doctor may suggest doing nothing for your enlarged thyroid. However, if the problem is a thyroid tumor or if your goiter is causing difficulty swallowing or breathing, you may need to consider surgery and other treatment.

Does aloe juice help acid reflux?

I no longer recommend *Aloe vera* juice to heal acid reflux and other irritations of the gastrointestinal tract because I think there are better natural treatments. I now suggest slowly chewing two tablets of deglycyrrhizinated licorice (DGL) between or before meals to increase the mucous coating of the esophageal lining and protect it from stomach-acid backwash. Aloe is a member of the lily family, and the plant's thick leaves are filled

with a clear gel that can be made into a sour-tasting juice. A couple of ounces of aloe juice—often sold in bottles at health food stores—might be drunk between or before meals to soothe acid reflux, yet there's little scientific evidence to support its use for this reason. Stomach cramps and diarrhea are two possible side effects of the beverage.

What is your opinion of drinking Essiac tea to treat cancer?

This herbal blend appears to be harmless and some lab tests suggest it has anticancer activity, but there's no clinical evidence that Essiac tea offers benefits to cancer patients. Developed in the 1920s, Essiac contains burdock root, Indian rhubarb root, sheep sorrel, and slippery elm, and it's typically drunk one to three times a day. Proponents claim the beverage boosts the immune system's ability to fight off cancer and also reduces the side effects of conventional treatments. Anecdotally, some people who use Essiac as an adjunctive treatment say it makes them feel better, so I don't object to trying the tea. (Reported side effects are nausea and vomiting.) But I certainly wouldn't rely on Essiac as a primary treatment for cancer: Some manufacturers advise against chemotherapy and other conventional treatments when using the tea, which I consider a reckless recommendation.

Is it true that seniors who get flu shots are more apt to get dementia?

No. This concern is based on controversial research conducted by Hugh Fudenberg, MD, which suggested that seniors who received the flu vaccine five years in a row between 1970 and 1980 were 10 times more likely to develop dementia than those who seldom received vaccinations (*International Journal of Clinical Investigation*, 2000). Dr. Fudenberg claimed that the buildup of thimerosal (a mercury-based preservative) from the flu vaccine led to cognitive dysfunction. But since then, the amount of preservative used in flu vaccines has been reduced to low

levels, and more-recent research has linked annual flu vaccination with a reduced risk of dementia. If you're still concerned, ask your doctor about getting a preservative-free vaccine (visit cdc.gov/flu/about/qa/thimerosal.htm for more information).

What do you think of hand-held cool-laser therapy to treat pain?

Cool (also called cold) laser therapy may be useful when done by a trained practitioner, but I'd avoid self-treating pain with hand-held laser devices since they may be ineffective unless you know what you're doing. Also called phototherapy, cold laser treatment is used primarily by physical therapists as an alternative or adjunctive treatment for musculoskeletal injuries and painful conditions. By placing light in contact with damaged tissue, phototherapy in theory stimulates cell function to promote healing. In most cases, it reduces inflammation, making recovery less painful. Unlike thermal lasers, which are hot to the touch, cold lasers are noninvasive and painless. Hand-held devices often cost \$2,000 or more and are not typically covered by health insurance.

Do you think a daily baby aspirin might contribute to tinnitus?

It's highly unlikely that taking aspirin at this low dose every day contributes to the ringing or buzzing sounds in the ear known as tinnitus. But this side effect might occur in people who are extremely sensitive to the pain reliever. The active compound in aspirin, a salicylate, can cause tinnitus at higher doses. The only way to know if tinnitus is aspirin related is to stop taking it for a week or so and see if the ringing in the ears lessens or goes away and returns if you resume aspirin therapy. Tinnitus can also be aggravated by wax buildup, an ear or sinus infection, and stress. **SP**

Please send your health questions to Ask Dr. Weil, Self Healing, 42 Pleasant St., Watertown MA 02472.

The Secrets of Smarter Snacking

Snacking has its place as part of a healthy eating program, and I usually do it several times a day. While I think it's fine to eat between meals, the trouble is not just what people are eating or how much, it's whether they're truly hungry or conscious of their intake and calories. To snack smarter, consider both the quality and quantity of your selections and follow my six tips.

Sidestep the pitfalls ▶ People often miss the boat on snacking by munching on junk food, eating too many unneeded calories, and doing so mindlessly when they're bored or stressed while at their desk, watching TV, or behind the wheel. And some people are grazing all day long instead of having balanced meals.

Make better choices ▶ Selecting snacks with a little protein and some fat, like a handful of raw walnuts, will keep you satisfied longer, points out Wendy Kohatsu, MD, an integrative physician and culinary student in Oregon. Snacks can also be an easy way to sneak in more fiber, she notes. New York-based

nutrition professor Marion Nestle, author of *What to Eat* (North Point Press, 2006), looks for "items with short ingredient lists, whole grains, no trans fat, and as little sugar or salt as possible." As for manufacturers' efforts to create more wholesome munchies such as baked fruit or vegetable crisps, she questions whether better junk food is truly better for you and says most diets would be healthier with fewer processed foods.

Keep it simple ▶ Bypass junk food with such nourishing noshes as high-fiber cereal with fruit, a cup of homemade soup, edamame, and whole-grain pita with bean dip or hummus. You can never go wrong with nature's best snacks—any fresh vegetable or fruit in season. Mid-morning or mid-afternoon, I often have some organic blueberries or strawberries, or even dried apricots or peaches. And to tide me over until my next meal, I might have a slice of Jarlsberg or Emmental cheese by itself or with a whole-grain cracker. For a crunchy alternative to chips, dunk cucumbers, carrots, or broccoli in a yogurt-based dip or salsa.

Think outside the bag ▶ You won't find these good-for-you snacks at the vending machine or convenience store, but they may inspire you to become a more imaginative nibbler. Dr. Kohatsu suggests a handful of antioxidant-rich goji berries, leftover sushi (or any remnants from dinner), smoked salmon with greens rolled in a tortilla, figs with reduced-fat goat cheese, salmon jerky (keep an eye on the sodium content, she warns), and oven-roasted root vegetables. She also recommends avocado in any form, such as sliced on a rye cracker with a sprinkling of Parmesan cheese and herb seasoning.

Bring your own ▶ When on planes, Dr. Kohatsu takes along green-tea bags and her own "instant" hot cereal blend, a mix of raw rolled oats, cinnamon, cardamom, and flaxseeds that's sweetened with dates or brown sugar. She puts it into a cup, stirs in hot water, and has a tasty in-flight breakfast. When traveling, she also suggests combining raw nuts, dried fruits, and one cup of air- or olive-oil popped popcorn. For a portable source of protein, she likes a hard-boiled egg, chunk of baked tofu, or string cheese, and for a healthy, green finger food she lightly steams snow peas or green beans until they're bright green, yet still crunchy.

Allow yourself a guilty pleasure ▶

Even nutrition experts splurge on a snack every now and then. When I do, I go for a piece of dark chocolate or some chocolate or coconut sorbet. Nestle occasionally hankers for frozen vanilla yogurt or thick potato chips seasoned with rosemary and olive oil, while Dr. Kohatsu admits to a weakness for frozen bananas with a dab of peanut butter or dark chocolate sauce. Of course, the trick is to savor a small amount of the indulgence slowly without wolfing down the entire pint, over-size bag, or half-pound bar. *SP*

Good for You!

When Food, Families, and Holidays Mix

Special occasions that involve eating and loved ones can be memorable gatherings, but also emotionally charged get-togethers. In some households, food signifies love, temptations abound, or negative family dynamics emerge around the dinner table. Prepare yourself for these potential scenarios with this thoughtful exercise.

Take pen in hand. Set aside a half-hour and write about what the approaching holiday means to you. What are the emotions that swirl to the surface for you? Are you angry? Apprehensive? Excited? How do you relate to those you'll be seeing? Are there emotional subtexts you must grapple with?

Do you have a negative family message that gets swallowed along with too much food or too much drink? Can you convert it to a positive, affirmative statement instead? Is there an action you can take to defuse the family dynamics?

Source: *The Writing Diet: Write Yourself Right-Size* by Julia Cameron (Penguin, 2007)

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